



Career Connections

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Transfer Guide:
**The College
Search Process**

The College Search Process

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College Search: Where to Start

You have been through the college search before, so think about how you decided on Landmark or a previous college. Was it your choice to attend? Who helped you? What criteria were important to you in your first college search?

Because you have now experienced college life at Landmark and possibly other colleges, your criteria for what you want at your next institution have likely changed or become more refined. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2012), there are 2,968 four-year colleges in the United States, and while it may seem daunting to narrow this list down to double or single digits, it can be done! This document is meant to help you conduct a college search and create a list of schools you would like to apply to. The activities offered are meant to make you think about the process and what you want.

Step 1: Research Yourself

The more time you spend focusing on yourself, your needs, and your wants, the easier it will become for you to find colleges that will be a good match for your academic aspirations and personality. What follows are a few exercises to help you think about yourself and what works for you.

The following questions are adapted from **COLLEGE ADMISSION, FROM APPLICATION TO ACCEPTANCE, STEP BY STEP** by Robin Mamlet and Christine Vandevelde. By answering these questions, you will likely start to see patterns appear that will help guide your college search.

Activity 1.1: Getting to Know You Your Personality and Preferences

Personality

1. What are the first words that come to mind when you're asked to describe yourself?

2. Name three values that are most important to you.

3. What would you consider your worst habit?

Interests and Activities

4. Which activity have you pursued inside or outside of school has been most meaningful to you?

5. What do you hate to do?

6. Is there a career you've always dreamed of?

Social Life

7. How would your friends describe you?

8. What person in your life has been the most influential and why?

School

9. How would your teachers describe you?

10. What teacher or professor do you have an important relationship with and why?

Academics and Learning Style

Academics

1. What is the most intellectually engaging class you have taken in college? Why? How has it influenced you?

2. What do you choose to learn when you learn on your own? Consider what topics you choose for research papers, lab reports, or independent reading.

3. What subjects have you excelled in?

4. What has been your greatest academic success?

5. What are your challenge areas academically?

6. When you have struggled in your class work, what do you do about it?

7. What academic supports have you found most helpful in high school and college?

Learning Style

8. Is it important for you to have close relationships with your professors?

9. In your own words, how would you describe your learning style?

The Next Step

10. Why are you going to college?

11. Which activities have you participated in or are you interested in pursuing at your next college, and what haven't you been able to pursue that you would like to try at your next college?

12. In there an activity/club you have to have at your next college?

13. What balance of study, activities, and social life are you looking for?

14. Is being in a leadership position important to you?

15. Do you want to live in a community where everyone knows your name, or one in which you can be anonymous?

Activity 1.2: Personal Priorities

After researching yourself, hopefully some priorities (i.e. things that are really important to you) have emerged. *What are your top 5 personal priorities that you should keep in mind when researching colleges to transfer to?* These can include, but are not limited to, things like being close to your family, being able to be a leader, or being able to have close relationships with your professors.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Additional Resources

THE FISKE GUIDE TO COLLEGES also offers a helpful quiz to help you determine your preferences in college size, location, personality, and character. You can pick up a copy of the quiz from Career Connections or [download the Fiske quiz online](#).

Step 2: Developing a College List

Once you have a sense of your priorities and what is important for you to have in your college experience, it is time for you to develop a list of colleges that you would like to do more research on and hopefully apply to.

A Career Connections counselor is happy to suggest colleges that fit your search criteria, but you will likely find it rewarding and helpful to engage in the research necessary to create a list of potential colleges too.

College Search Web Tools

There are great resources available on the internet to help you find colleges that fit within your criteria. Below are a few that our office uses and recommends. It is a good idea to try more than one search engine, as they may have different search criteria and may offer you different options.

Websites:

My Big Future College Search (College Board): <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>

Good for visual learners

Easy-to-use search engine that allows you to select a variety of criteria and provides you with a list of colleges that fit that criteria. You can also look up colleges to receive very basic information about them (e.g. size, location, majors).

College Navigator (National Center for Educational Statistics): <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

Good for data-driven thinkers

While not as visually appealing as Big Future, College Navigator allows you to run college searches based on basic criteria and provides comprehensive information about schools on enrollment, admissions, financial aid, and retention.

Career Cruising:

Good for data-driven thinkers

The Office of Transfer and Career Service uses the robust career exploration platform, Career Cruising. Career Cruising not only offers opportunities to explore your career interests, but it also features a college search engine. You can save any college of interest to your personal profile within Career Cruising. Just ask Transfer and Career Services to set you up with an account.

College Confidential: http://www.collegeconfidential.com/college_search/

Good for visual learners

Similar to Big Future in its search capabilities and look, College Confidential features some interesting search criteria such as political views on campus, GLBT friendliness, and the party scene on campus.

Activity 2.1: College Search Engines

Try running the same college search on 3 of the 4 search engines listed above. Use the following criteria, putting in your personal preferences for each (make sure it is similar across search engines):

Location: _____

Size: _____

Selectivity: (percentage of students admitted) _____

Major: _____

Now compare the lists each college gave you:

How similar are the lists of colleges provided by each search engine?

Exactly the same

Pretty similar

Lots of differences

Totally different

Which search engine provided the most information?

Which search engine was the easiest for you to use and understand?

After this exercise, which search engine would you prefer to use?

Step 3: Evaluating College Websites and Marketing Materials

As you start to uncover colleges that fit your search criteria, the next step is to start to research these institutions beyond their basic facts. The easiest place to start is usually the college's website, and you may have some brochures on hand from the college you can also consult.

Websites can offer an endless amount of information, so where should you start? What will help you determine if this is the right college for you? Below is a list of questions to help guide your research. You may not be able to find the answers to all of the questions, but they may want to be things you keep in mind as you go through your college search.

College Research Questions

Academics

1. If undecided on a major, are there majors that appeal to me?
2. What does the whole academic program look like? What general education requirements might I need to complete as a transfer student (e.g. foreign language, math, science, etc)?
3. What is the student to teacher ratio and average class size? Will the class sizes work for me?
4. How many full-time faculty do they have (as opposed to part-time/adjunct)? How many have PhDs or terminal degrees in their field?
 - a. **NOTE:** Why does this matter? Typically, full-time faculty are more available and accessible to students than adjunct faculty (i.e. part-time) who may only be teaching a class or two, and have other career obligations outside of the college.

Admissions and Financial Aid

5. What are the admission/applications requirements for transfer students?
6. What is the incoming student academic profile (.i.e. average incoming GPA, test scores)? Do I fit within that profile? If below the average, how far below am I? You can usually find this information in the "about" section under "fast facts" or "quick facts".
7. If you are applying for financial aid, what is the yearly tuition? What percentage of students receive financial aid and in what forms (e.g. scholarships, grants, loans)? What is the average financial aid package and the average out-of-pocket cost for students?

Student Life

8. What do current students have to say about the college? What is the "feel" (may want to look at student blogs and external websites)?
9. Are there any traditions or big annual events on campus?
10. Do the clubs, activities, speakers, they have on campus interest me?
11. What is the location like? Is this a place I could spend the next two+ years?
12. Where does the student body come from? Mostly in-state or out-of-state?
13. What do their graduates do? What do the college's job placement rates look like?

Your Career Connections counselor can help you interpret the information you find, or, if you get stuck, look through the website with you.

Activity 3.1: Pros and Cons

As you research colleges, you need to take notes! You can either aim at trying to answer the questions above for each college, or you can start a pros and cons list (or both!). When researching 8-12 colleges, it becomes easy to forget what college had what program and what you really liked. Career Connections has additional blank pro/cons list if you find them useful.

Colleges I've found	Pros	Cons
1. 2. 3.		1. 2. 3.
1. 2. 3.		1. 2. 3.
1. 2. 3.		1. 2. 3.
1. 2. 3.		1. 2. 3.

Step 4: Using Third Party Websites for Research

All colleges are going to tell you on their websites how great they are and why you should go there. Where can you find less biased information about the college?

Books

There are several college guides available that can help you learn more about a college from an outsider's perspective. Here are some we recommend (Career Connections located in EAB also has copies of all of these):

Colleges that Change Lives- This book features 40 small, moderately-selective liberal arts colleges from around the nation that are offering life-changing undergraduate college experiences. There is a wide-variety of colleges represented in the book and you will likely find a college or two that sounds like you!

Fiske Guide to Colleges-**THE FISKE GUIDE** features over 300 colleges, providing brief descriptions of their personality and what they have to offer, along with quick reference sidebars that address things like admissions standards, financial aid, and overall student quality of life.

The Princeton Review, The Best 379 Colleges- Similar to **THE FISKE GUIDE**, **THE PRINCETON REVIEW** profiles nearly 400 colleges, offering descriptions that were compiled after they surveyed students.

The K&W Guide to College Program and Services for Students with Learning Disabilities or AD/HD- This guide speaks to colleges' learning supports at some of the nation's most popular colleges.

Cool Colleges- This book profiles progressive colleges offering unique curriculums and programs.

Creative Colleges- Great resource for students interested in going into the fine arts and similar creative majors. It suggests colleges worth consideration in each of the fine arts categories and also addresses what students majoring in the fine arts should be considering when choosing a college.

Websites

U-CAN- <http://www.ucan-network.org/>

If you are considering a private college, U-CAN is a great tool to find REAL data on a college. This website is maintained by the National Center for Independent Colleges and Universities and is good for visual learners because it shows all statistics in graph form.

The Princeton Review- <http://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings.aspx> (account required)
Similar to the book, the website offers descriptions taken from student surveys about colleges and "top 20" list in categories ranging from "Best Dorms" to "Where Students Study the Most."

College Prowler- <https://colleges.niche.com/> (account required)

This website allows current college students to rate their institutions and provide feedback. This shouldn't be the only website you use for information, but works well to give you a more complete picture of a college.

UNIGO- <https://www.unigo.com/> (account required)

In addition to easy to read college facts it also features reviews from current students.

Step 5: Next steps

Demonstrating interest

Once you have established the list of colleges you will be applying to, you should let the colleges know you are interested! This is what we call “demonstrated interest” and many colleges will take what they see as your level of interest in them into consideration in the application process.

So how can you demonstrate interest?

- *Sign-up for the college’s mailing list.* You can typically do this on their website (usually somewhere on the admissions page), or if you talk to an admissions representative at a college fair or during a visit to our campus you can complete what’s called an ‘inquiry card.’
- *Visit the campus.* Many colleges understand that making a college visit is a commitment of both your time and money, so they definitely take notice if you take the extra effort to visit their campus. Of course, some colleges have so many visitors they may never know you were there because they did not require you to complete any paperwork. But if you do have to register for a tour, know that they are probably tracking this information somewhere. Refer to the [Transfer & Career Services Guide to Transferring: Planning College Visits](#) for tips on how to prepare for and make the most of a campus visit.
- *Emails and phone calls to the office.* You may want to consider sending an email to the admissions counselor that works with transfer students, if you can find out who that is. You can introduce yourself, and ask any questions that would help you better understand the college (though you should avoid questions that you could easily answer by looking on their website). Keep in mind that larger institutions or very selective colleges may not return emails or phone calls.
 - *NOTE:* It should be you making contact and NOT your parent. Because many colleges track communication they receive from prospective students, they will make a note that they spoke with your parent and not you. Colleges expect transfer students to be more mature than first-years and more in charge of their college search process, so make sure you are demonstrating this with your communication to colleges!

Step 6: Tips for creating a smart college list

- The final list of colleges you are applying to should include 6-8 schools, but no more than 12.
- You should have a number of “first choices” on your list (ideally, they would all be first choices!). That is, several schools you would be excited to attend and would thrive at both socially and academically.
- Make sure to factor in selectivity when creating your list. You should have no less than 3 schools where you would be a solid admit based on their academic profile, and at least 3 schools where your admission is probable (meaning you are more likely to be admitted than not admitted). You will end up significantly limiting your future options if you only apply to schools where your admission would be a statistical reach (i.e. you are significantly below their academic profile).
- It’s okay to have some schools on your list that are statistical reaches, but this should not be your whole list! This is especially true of highly selective institutions that admit very, very few transfer students.
- If financial aid is a concern, you may want to have a list that includes both state and private options. All colleges have what is called a “net price calculator” on their website and you can use this BEFORE applying to get an idea of what your financial aid package will be at that college and whether it fits within your budget.
- Can you picture yourself being happy at each school on your list? If not, consider cutting those colleges that don’t meet this simple criteria! Does this leave you with too few schools on the list? Time to start the research process over again! You’ll be happy in the long run that you did.
- Be cautious about using college ranking systems to create your college list. The criteria used to create the list may not be the same as your own criteria! While ranking systems may be able to point you in some directions you hadn’t considered, they should not be the primary source for creating your individualized college search.
- Your college list is flexible and very likely will change as you begin to work on applications and visit colleges. It is important to keep an open mind as you go through this process.

Activity 6.1: My College List

After having read and participated in the activities in this handout, you have hopefully developed a list of colleges you would like to apply, or at least visit in the near future.

College Name	Likelihood of being admitted- Likely, Maybe, Statistical Reach
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	