



COFFEE AND COLLEGE:

THE CURRENT STATE OF ADMISSIONS AND HOW TO
HELP YOUR STUDENT START EXPLORING SCHOOLS

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November, 2021



Goal of this program:

- Turn down the temperature – this should not be a frantic or stressful process.
- Stress comes from things we can't control – and you and your student ARE in control – you are the consumer.
- There are some things about the college admissions process that are true broadly, and many other things that are not true, but create panic. We will explore the differences.
- The goal is to impart information in order to empower families to make informed choices about college.



Things families need to know and understand:

What are broad trends in higher education? What pieces are only true for a small subset of schools?

How admissions decisions are made: what does holistic admissions mean?

The increasing cost of college – and what you can do to make college more affordable

The rise of test optional policies and what that means for your student

The State of College Admissions: True or false?

- It is SO hard to get into college! **FALSE**
 - Approximately 80% of colleges admit more than 50% of applicants! Average admit rate is 65%.
- There are only a few “good” colleges where my child can/should go! **FALSE**
 - There is NO scarcity of higher education choices! YOU need to decide what is a good school for you!
- College applications are surging making it harder to get in! **FALSE**
 - True AT A TINY SUBSET OF COLLEGES! Most colleges have plenty of room and enrollment is declining at community colleges nationwide.
 - Many students believed that because a school was test optional last year, no matter how selective, meant that they might have a shot and should apply – despite not being a viable candidate for admission based on the rest of their application without test scores. This led to surging applications but profile of admitted students was relatively identical to previous years.

How Admissions Decisions are Made: Holistic Admissions

- Holistic Admission - used by many (arguably most?) colleges.
- Looks at whole student and evaluates all parts of the application: activities, essays, ACT/SAT scores (if provided), and **most important** the transcript (courses taken and grades received).
- Schools often look for examples of character, collaboration, creativity – ways in which the student engages with the world around them.
- Anytime a college asks for anything additional on an application beyond grades and scores, it is holistic admission.
- Context is so important to all colleges: what academic opportunities has the student had and how did the student perform within what was offered? Social context of the student's community is also an important factor.

University of California – Comprehensive Review

- Comprehensive Review is similar to holistic admissions
- System calls out 13 points they consider as they review every application.
- Test-free – no longer consider SAT or ACT tests at all (they will not be seen by the application reader). If the student is admitted and enrolls, scores may be used for class placement.
- Comprehensive review provides great transparency in the UC criteria and can provide an idea of what any college might look for.
- NOTE FOR SENIOR YEAR COURSE SELECTION: One of UC's criteria (and echoed by any number of colleges as being very important: "Quality of a student's senior-year program, as measured by the type and number of academic courses in progress or planned. Please do not think you should slack off, take fewer or easier courses senior year. Your upward trajectory in terms of rigor and grades is important!

What are colleges looking for?

Authenticity. “Don’t try to be impressive, just share who you are.” (former admissions rep at Cal Tech, Arun Ponnusamy).

Not looking for perfection – looking for a student who is ready to grow and learn; a student who is enthusiastic about learning.

Want to see how students spend their time and why. There is no hierarchy of activities, and jobs are great.

At highly selective colleges, many applicants are academically eligible. So, they want students who will have an impact on the world.

Also want kindness – who are you when no one is watching.

Who are you now, and who will you be when you leave. How do you show you will take advantage of what the school has to offer, but also give back.

Colleges look for intent.



TALKING TESTS: SAT, ACT AND THE RISE OF “TEST OPTIONAL”

First, some definitions:

- “Test optional” means that if a student has taken a standardized test (SAT or ACT) and wishes to submit their score when applying, a college will consider it as part of the application. If a student does NOT submit a score at a test optional college, they will not be disadvantaged in the admissions process.
- Test flexible – not widely used, often refers to a college’s policy allowing students to send scores on a variety of tests including AP, IB and/or SAT or ACT.
- Test free (aka test blind) means that even if a student submits a score, it will not be seen by the application reader and will not be considered in the admissions process. Once a student is admitted, it may be considered for placement out of some courses, depending on the college’s policies.

Not a new practice...

- Bowdoin College in Maine, became test optional in 1969.
- Prior to the pandemic, over 1,000 colleges were test optional. (National Center for Fair and Open Testing – the go-to source: www.fairtest.org)
- Scope and scale of test optional schools escalated during pandemic when tests could not be offered safely.
- U Chicago was the first highly selective, big-name private school to go test optional (June, 2018); Cal Tech is test free.
- Indiana University at Bloomington became test optional just prior to the pandemic
- Due to lawsuits, University of California system became test-free: CSUs followed. Both systems will remain test free for the foreseeable future (even though they had talked about using another testing measure, that has been put on hold or even dismissed).

The change to test optional: a variety of reasons and speeds



There was long-standing conversation that standardized testing was not equitable or predictive of a student's success in college.



Often testing policies are set in state law for public schools; in other instances, faculty, administration or board of trustees have a say in deciding school testing policies – so they do not necessarily change quickly or easily and rarely at the urging of admissions.



The rise in number of test optional schools should empower students to decide what is the best use of their time (and money) as prep is time-consuming and expensive.

What does it mean to students? Should I test? And when?

Check your college's policies – some still require submission of tests. Public schools in Georgia and Florida require tests (but with a low bar for scores). Some colleges love tests (looking at you, Georgetown).

Many schools have not announced testing policies going forward. Some schools had a one-year hiatus, others had 3-year pilot...all are evaluating how decisions went last cycle and how students are doing.

Are test scores required for honors status? Merit aid? If so, take that into account when making your decision whether to test.

Timing – Students can take a “real” SAT or ACT in spring of junior year and again fall of senior year. Most colleges accept scores taken prior to submission of application (fall of senior year) – but again, check your schools' websites.

If your colleges are test free or test optional, you may not need or wish to test – and that is fine!

If the student takes the test, should they submit the score?



It depends! And the answer will vary by school.



Are you proud of the score? Do you feel it is an accurate representation of your ability and/or potential?



Will it strengthen your application? Is it in the top tier of the school's admitted student profile? This is why the decision will vary by school!



If your colleges are test optional, be strategic. You can choose to send scores to some schools and not to others.

Outcomes from test optional admissions last year...

- Percentage of students submitting scores varied by geography. Some parts of the country were able to get test dates; others saw test administrations cancelled over and over – often with no notice. Lots of bad PR for ACT and College Board (SAT).
- Private schools who attract students from throughout the country seemed to indicate that those who applied without test scores were admitted at roughly the same rate as those with scores. Examples: Tulane indicated 51% of incoming students applied w/out scores; Northeastern said applied, admitted and enrolled were all 50%; same for SMU, and Miami of Ohio.
- Colleges who were on one-year or pilot programs will announce policies going forward hopefully in early spring to give juniors adequate time to prepare and test if desired.



RISING COLLEGE COSTS

And what you can do about them...

Your degree costs HOW much??

- Parents need to understand the costs associated with undergraduate programs. Community Colleges are the most cost effective; Cal State schools are next - \$28K; UC schools \$38K, private colleges up to \$85K – per year! Some private schools offer enough aid to make them less expensive than our public schools.
- Not every family pays sticker price. Approximately 89% of freshmen have some financial aid (also known as tuition discount).
- Parents need to educate themselves about the financial aid process and the difference between need-based and merit aid. Merit aid is basically a marketing tool colleges use to encourage students they want, to enroll.
- Don't eliminate a school from contention due to the cost if you might be well-positioned to receive merit aid. Use the Net Price Calculator for each school on your list.
- Please check out resources found on www.LJHSCollegeInfo.com under the Financial Aid tab. You will find explanations, links, previous financial aid presentations.

How to reduce your college costs:

Have an open family conversation about college finances – do it early in the process NOT in the spring of senior year.

Be very strategic and intentional about creating the college list. A college that meets 100% of need can meet that need with loans. Not a great option.

Look for schools that offer generous financial aid. How to tell? They offer aid to a high percentage of no-need students. College Data is a great resource.

DIY College Rankings and The College Solution offer practical advice and mind-expanding blogs.

Use online resources on Facebook – Paying for College 101; Road2College pages offer a lot of great advice.

Families need to be open minded! Be willing to look at schools you are not familiar with if they provide a good value and meet other priorities (location, size, program).



EXPLORING COLLEGES AND ASSEMBLING THE COLLEGE LIST

How to help your student explore colleges:

- Have that conversation about finances and expectations. If schools don't provide an appropriate level of financial aid, make sure your student understands that they cannot attend.
- Understand that there are MANY college options. Understand your own priorities and create your own definition of a "good" school.
- Understand that liberal arts colleges focus on undergraduate teaching. Allows students to create strong relationships with professors. The liberal arts include sciences, and many LAC students go to med school.
- If the student has a very strong affinity for a single subject, have them research their colleges of interest's core requirements.
- Community College is a great option – but students who successfully transfer to 4-year schools are driven, meet with advisors and transfer coordinators, and take (and do well in) necessary coursework.
- There are many options for students who have not performed well during high school. Many Cal State schools will admit students with a GPA less than 3.0, and many schools admit 95-100% of their applicants.
- For high performing students, consider schools one tier down as those schools will award high-performers a lot of aid, along with honors status, research opportunities, early registration, and other perks.
- Goal is a good fit! Academically challenging but not overwhelming, socially engaging, and a financial fit for the family.

Help your student think deeply about how they learn – and about why they are going to college!

- Gallup-Purdue study identified six factors that correlate to whether students thrive in life after college:
 - Taking a course with a professor who makes learning exciting
 - Working with professors who care about students personally
 - Finding a mentor who encourages students to pursue personal goals
 - Working on a project across several semesters
 - Participating in an internship that applies classroom learning
 - Being active in extracurricular activities

<https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/gallup/>

Resources for students to use to research colleges AND to get to better know themselves:

- Xello has college search and match tools. Counselors will be in junior classrooms next month to describe more about how to make the most use of Xello.
- College Board's Big Future used to have a terrific search/match tool but they have changed it and it is much less helpful. They have received lots of negative feedback so hope springs eternal that they will change it back. Students can try it here: <https://collegesearch.collegeboard.org/home>.
- You can create a free account on any/all of the following websites to assist with college exploration. They all have a variety of features which can help you explore colleges. Cappex is also a great scholarship resource.
 - College Data (www.collegedata.com),
 - CollegeXpress (<https://www.collegexpress.com/college/search/>),
 - Cappex (<https://www.cappex.com/>),
 - College Navigator (<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>).

Ask your student to create priorities beyond size and location (although don't forget to talk about cost and aid):

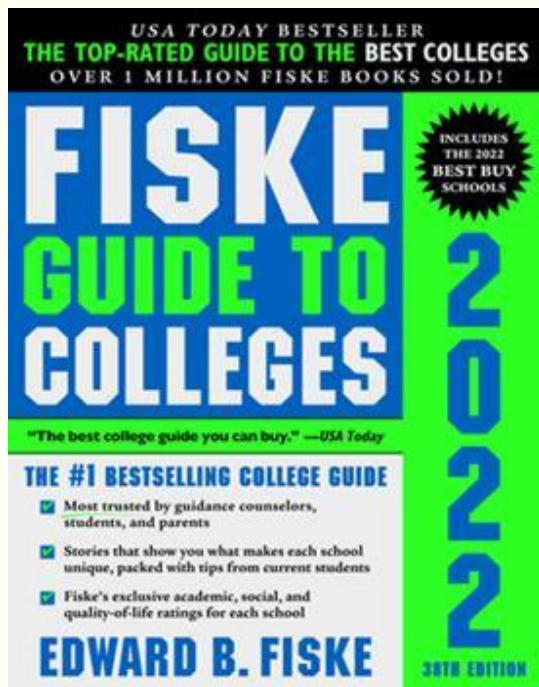
- Educational Culture:
- How do you learn best – in small groups? In a lecture environment? In a discussion-based setting?
- Do you like be competitive or collaborative in your academic work?
- Think about a favorite project or paper you have worked on – what was the subject and format? What did you enjoy most about it?
- What classes do you love most in school? Which do you dislike the most?
- Do you like being at the top of your class or do you do better when pushed by your peers (big fish/small pond or the opposite)?
- Are you looking for a creative academic culture?
- Do you need structure?
- Do you want to get a broad education (take classes in different fields) or take most of your classes in your area of interest? Understand core, general education, or breadth requirements.

More things to consider and ask your student:

- Campus Culture –
- Do you want a residential experience? What does that look like and what type of housing might be important to you? Be sure you can get on-campus housing as a freshman.
- What are you looking for in outside the classroom activities? Greek life? Clubs? Outdoor opportunities? Drama groups? Musical opportunities?
- Are you interested in co-ops or internships?
- Are you looking to participate in spectator sports? Do you want to play a sport (even at an intramural or club level)?
- Is it important for you to meet a broad array of students? Different backgrounds? Different cultures?
- What does a “college experience” mean to you?
- Are there other services you know you will need – mental health, tutoring, disability services?
- To what extent will cost/affordability/financial aid influence your college decision?

More exploration resources:

- College Essay Guy: <https://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/how-to-choose-a-college>
- Steven Antonoff: <https://schoolbuff.com/worksheets/>
- Fiske Guide to Colleges (available at the LJ Library) – particularly similar schools

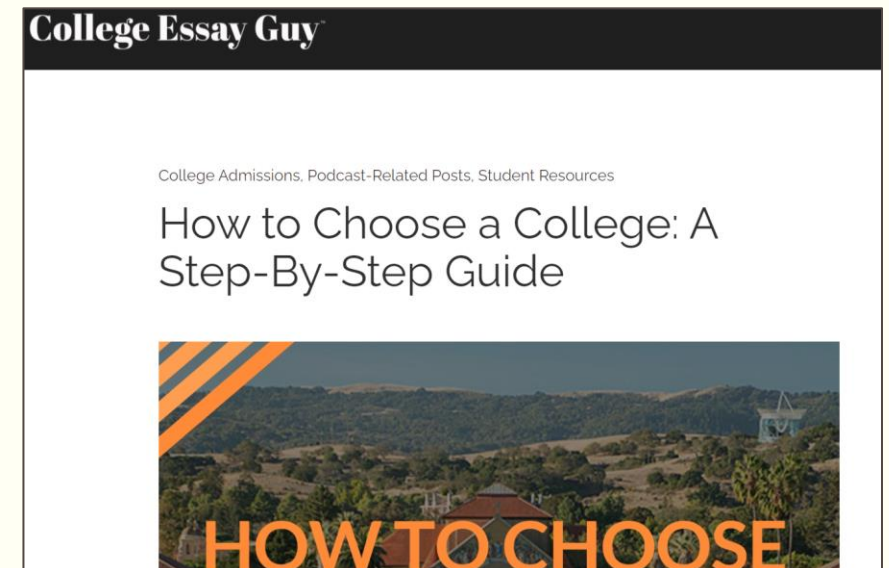


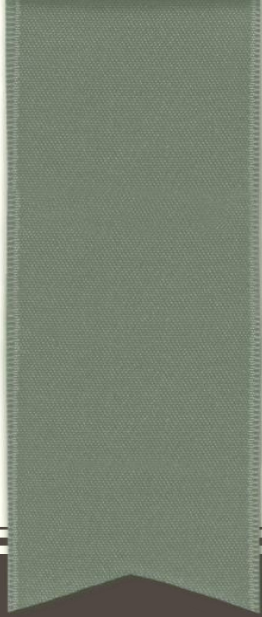
College Match - A Blueprint for Choosing the Best School for You 1

Self-Survey for the College-Bound

Respond carefully to these questions about your educational attitudes, goals, and perspectives. Be absolutely truthful and genuine as you answer each question. Keep in mind, there are no "correct" responses. For each item, check the appropriate answer category—"strongly agree," "agree," "lean toward disagree," or "disagree." Even if you are unsure of an answer or your response falls between two categories, answer every question but check only one answer per question.

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Lean Toward Disagree	Disagree
1. There are several social issues or causes that I care about deeply.				
2. I often participate in class discussions.				
3. I enjoy reading.				
4. I feel I know myself pretty well.				
5. I'm excited for my college years to begin.				
6. There are at least three things I can do better than others around me and at least three things others can do better.				
7. If I don't understand something in class, I typically feel comfortable asking my teacher a question.				





A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS...

Brands, rankings and books – oh, my!

- A low admit rate is not a proxy for value! It does create a notion of scarcity, which is a myth. There are plenty of colleges to go around.
- Name on the degree is not nearly as important as what you do at a school. Check out the Gallup/Purdue poll to understand long-term satisfaction with the college experience.
- Students who were admitted to Ivy League schools but chose to go elsewhere ended up just as successful. Ivy League schools didn't make these students great – they were great to begin with (treatment effect and selection effect).
- Should be required reading: Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be by Frank Bruni, Who Gets In and Why by Jeffrey Selingo, The College Conversation by Eric Furda and Jacques Steinberg, The Price You Pay for College by Ron Lieber.
- “The process is unpredictable but not random.” – Calvin Wise, Johns Hopkins

Words of wisdom:



- “Students try to fit themselves into the school’s mold – that is upside-down. Make sure the institution fits your needs and interests. Forget college’s rankings. Be authentic and true to yourself in choosing your school list.”
- Femi Ogundele, Dean of Undergraduate Admission, UC Berkeley

How can parents help?

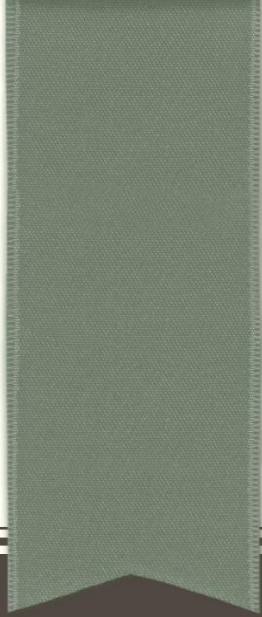
- Educate yourself about the process and the current world of higher education.
- Read the weekly eNews “College Corner” column.
- Check out the Facebook page LJHS College Info – many timely articles are posted there.
- Explore the website www.LJHSCollegeInfo.com and check out the plethora of information found there.





PARENTS: PLEASE DO NOT TAKE OVER THE PROCESS!

Educate yourself, but this is your student's journey – their interests, their goals, their future.



THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!
