



6 Tips for Making a Better College Search List



If you want to make a better college search list, don't limit your potential list of colleges to just schools you have heard of. There are over 1,500 four-year US colleges-there is no reason to start off with a short list of five institutions. Having a larger list of colleges opens up opportunities you haven't even considered at prices you didn't think possible.

Your college search list is not the same thing as your college application list where five schools is a very reasonable number. The college search list should contain at least 20 schools, more if you have the time to [research](#) them. A good search list will include colleges that you haven't considered or heard of before you started creating the search list.

This is the time to be open to new ideas. Pick or imagine your ideal school in every aspect. Go all out and assume you have a full scholarship to attend. Would you go if it were 500 miles away? What if it is was significantly smaller than you wanted? Or maybe it doesn't have the big time college sports you're looking for? If just one of these factors was missing, would you still attend if you had a full scholarship?

If you would still consider going than you need to realize that these "requirements" you have already created are probably limiting some very good schools from your list. You can start expanding your list by taking one college you're interested in and changing or removing a limiting characteristic to find similar schools.

For example, say you are interested in big universities with finance majors in the northeast. Start by changing finance to business or economics in general. What schools does that add to your list? Or maybe keep the finance part but add the mid-west or change big to medium-sized.

Ultimately, these new schools may not stay on your list. However, it's more likely that you will discover possibilities that you hadn't considered and revise the criteria for your list. Finance may still be critical but you might decide that there can be mitigating circumstances as far as size goes.

Here are six things you can do to expand your college search list.

1. Ignore [geography](#). By this I mean both location, such as state, and place, such as rural. There are a lot of preconceived notions about colleges based on geography alone. Ultimately, geography may be an important consideration for narrowing your list of colleges. But by keeping geography out of the equation to begin with, you may discover other factors that more than make up for being in a place you had thought was less than desirable.
2. Don't use [rankings](#) to keep colleges off your list. Rankings are arbitrary, one person's top ten may not make it to another person's top 50. If and when you do use rankings to narrow your college search list, be sure to understand the basis for the rankings.
3. Look up similar colleges at [collegeresults.org](#). If you know of a school that you really like, look it up to see 25 other schools that collegeresults.org considers similar. As when using the rankings, it is a good idea to see how they determine similar colleges. However, it's a fast and easy way to expand your horizons.
4. Look at net cost rather than tuition. Few people pay full price. You can get an even better idea of net cost by income level by using the [College Navigator](#). Make sure you have already calculated an estimated [EFC](#) and use the colleges' [net price calculators](#).

AVERAGE NET PRICE FOR FULL-TIME BEGINNING STUDENTS

Full-time beginning undergraduate students who were awarded grant or scholarship aid from federal, state or local governments, or the institution.

	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Average net price	\$26,203	\$26,013	\$27,851

Full-time beginning undergraduate students who were awarded Title IV aid by income.

AVERAGE NET PRICE BY INCOME	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
\$0 – \$30,000	\$13,993	\$15,376	\$17,483
\$30,001 – \$48,000	\$16,359	\$16,133	\$19,611
\$48,001 – \$75,000	\$18,371	\$19,170	\$20,769
\$75,001 – \$110,000	\$24,267	\$24,324	\$25,475
\$110,001 and more	\$30,820	\$31,394	\$29,344

5. Instead of acceptance rates, look at the 75th percentile test scores. For example, there are 80 institutions where the 75th% SAT CR+M scores is between 1300 and 1350. The acceptance rates range from 25% to 90%. There are 80 colleges with acceptance rates between 30 and 40 percent and the 75th percentile SAT CR+M scores range from 870 to 1500. Admission rates often reflect a lot of self-selection so try a different approach.

6. Don't use [college size](#) in making your preliminary list. This is another area where many students have assumptions that they haven't really tested. Also, it's simply a matter of numbers since there are just a lot more smaller colleges than bigger ones. Begin by looking at the percentage of classes by class size or the number or type of classes available for specific majors.

You can get a list of colleges that accept at least 50 percent of their applicants and have at least a 50 percent graduation rate the [50-50 College Listing](#). Information on geography, size, graduation rates, acceptance rates, test scores, majors, and more are available in the [DIY College Rankings College Search Spreadsheet](#).

More Resources for Finding and Paying for College

Best Free Resources for Finding and Paying for College Guide

Guide to 17 free PDFs, spreadsheets, and websites. [Click here to get your free copy.](#)

College Financial Aid Timeline

What you need to know about financial aid starting with high school juniors. [Click here to get your free copy.](#)

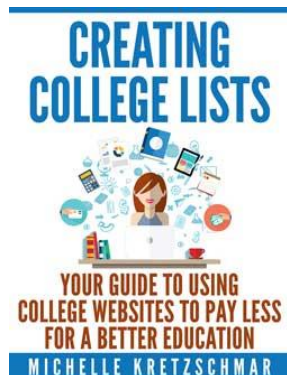
College Application Tracker Spreadsheet

[Free spreadsheet](#) to track your college application deadlines. Includes a financial timeline.

50-50 PDF College Listing

Listing of all colleges by state that have at least a 50% acceptance rate and 50% graduation rate in a [PDF format](#).

Don't have any idea of where to go to college?



Here's how to start making your list of colleges. If you're willing to step away from the rankings spotlight, you can find some impressive programs at great values. All it takes is a little time and a visit to one of the most ignored resources in creating a college list: the college website. [Find out more.](#)