

**1**

SESSION I: GOAL SETTING: TAKING STOCK

## ACTIVITY #2: COLLEGE MEANS...: HOW DO YOU DEFINE COLLEGE?

### *Opening Discussion:*

The purpose of this exercise is to determine how much the students know about colleges and how accurate their information is. Remember that “college” can include various forms of higher education, including community college and vocational schools.

### *Activity/Handouts:*

#### **Definition Worksheet**

#### **Considering College Types**

### *Instructions:*

1. Ask students to pair with a partner and then try to identify specific names of colleges among the categories of colleges listed to see what they know about different types of colleges.
2. Use this exercise to generate discussion about the variety of options in higher education and to give students an opportunity to interact with one another.
3. After answering questions, ask students to turn to “Considering College Types” and read it together or silently, circling or highlighting any facts that interest them or about which they have questions.
4. Answer questions once students have completed the reading.

## HOW DO YOU DEFINE COLLEGE?

Two-year \_\_\_\_\_

Four-year \_\_\_\_\_

Ivy League \_\_\_\_\_

Historically Black \_\_\_\_\_

Urban \_\_\_\_\_

Suburban \_\_\_\_\_

Specialized:

• Engineering \_\_\_\_\_

• Culinary \_\_\_\_\_

• Art \_\_\_\_\_

• Medical \_\_\_\_\_

• Fashion \_\_\_\_\_

• Technology \_\_\_\_\_

• International \_\_\_\_\_

Coed \_\_\_\_\_

Single Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Public \_\_\_\_\_

Private \_\_\_\_\_

Major Athletic Conferences \_\_\_\_\_

Religiously affiliated \_\_\_\_\_

Undergraduate \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate \_\_\_\_\_

Division III \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

From: *The College Board College Advising Basics Workbook*

## CONSIDERING COLLEGE TYPES

Colleges aren't all the same. Different colleges and universities have different missions (functions or goals). While no two are exactly alike, most fit into one or more of the following categories:

**Liberal Arts Colleges** focus on the education of undergraduate students. Classes are generally taught by professors who see teaching as their primary responsibility. Because most liberal arts colleges are smaller than universities, classes tend to be smaller and more personal attention is available. As opposed to gaining preparation for a specific career path, students who attend liberal arts colleges are exposed to a broad base of courses in the humanities, social sciences and sciences. In addition, they select at least one area of in-depth study which is their college "major." Many employers look for graduates of liberal arts programs, valuing their well-rounded preparation.

**Universities** are generally larger and include a liberal arts college, as well as some professionally-oriented colleges and graduate programs. Universities offer a greater range of academic choices than do liberal arts colleges. They will likely provide more extensive resources in terms of library, laboratory, fine arts and athletic facilities. At many large universities class size will reflect institutional size, with most introductory classes being taught in a lecture format. Some classes will be taught by graduate students. Professors at major universities will be involved in research which adds to the vitality of the academic community, but may also draw energy, focus, and resources away from undergraduate teaching.

**Technical Institutes and Professional Schools** enroll students who have made clear decisions about what they want to study. They emphasize preparation for specific careers, for example in music or fine arts, engineering or technical sciences. You will want to be quite sure of your future direction before selecting one of these options.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities** find their origins in the time when African American students were systematically denied access to most other colleges and universities. Students at HBCU's have a unique opportunity to experience an educational community in which they are a part of the majority. They find committed faculty mentors who encourage their expectations of success.

**Tribal Colleges** are similar to HBCU's, focusing on the needs and education of American Indian students.

**Women's Colleges**, with their larger numbers of female faculty and administrators, offer college women confidence-building role models, greater opportunities to serve in a full range of student leadership positions, and a heightened awareness of career possibilities for women. Women's colleges graduate a high number of science majors, as well as students who continue on to graduate school and/or professional studies.

**Community or junior colleges** generally offer the first two years of a liberal arts education, in addition to specialized occupational preparation. An associate degree is awarded at the end of a two-year program of studies, following which many students continue their education at a four-year institution.

**Proprietary institutions** are considered for-profit companies that operate under the demands of investors and stockholders. They attract adult learners and part-time students in search of narrowly-focused professional training opportunities. These programs usually offer a non-traditional format; many for-profits also have classes solely available online.

## OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS TO CONSIDER IN SELECTING COLLEGES

**ACCREDITATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE FEDERAL STUDENT AID PROGRAMS:** The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by colleges and universities meets acceptable levels of quality. Accrediting agencies, which are private educational associations of regional or national scope, develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met. To participate in the federal student aid programs, an institution must be accredited by an accrediting agency or state approval agency recognized by the US Secretary of Education as a “reliable authority as to the quality of postsecondary education” within the meaning of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended. This is all very technical, but the bottom line is if a college or university is unaccredited, it will not be able to offer federal student aid. You should be very cautious about considering a school that does not participate in the federal student aid programs.

**INSTITUTION SIZE:** The size of a college or university will have an impact upon many of your opportunities and experiences. The range of academic majors offered, the extracurricular possibilities, the amount of personal attention you'll receive, and the number of books in the library will all be influenced by size.

In considering size, however, it is essential that you look beyond the raw number of students attending. Consider instead, average class size for both first year students and upperclassmen. Investigate not just the number of faculty, but also how accessible faculty are to students. Perhaps you are considering a small department within a large school, or vice versa. Large schools may offer extensive support services for students with special needs or those who are experiencing difficulty. Smaller schools may not be able to fund similar programs. On the other hand, extra support may not be necessary if faculty work closely with individual students.

**LOCATION:** Distance from home may be important to you. Is it important to you to be able to visit home frequently, or do you see this as a time to experience a new part of the country? Some of you will prefer an urban environment with access to museums, ethnic food or major league ball games. Others will hope for easy access to outdoor activities or the serenity and safety of a more rural setting.

**ACADEMIC PROGRAMS:** If you have a good idea of something specific you want to study in college or a career for which you want to prepare, look for well-respected academic departments in this discipline at the colleges you explore. Talk with professors and students in these departments. Research relative reputation by surveying adults already in the field and using printed resources which rank academic departments.

You should not limit your selection process to academic program issues alone. Studies show that a majority of college students change college major at least once during their college years. Therefore, it is important to pick a college or university that will offer you many appealing possibilities. Look for unique options such as study abroad, unusual academic calendars, or cooperative education plans which enable you to include several paid internships with your class work, as ways of enhancing your education.

If you are undecided, relax and pick an academically-balanced institution which offers a range of majors and programs. Most colleges offer expert counseling to help the undecided student find a focus.

**CAMPUS LIFE:** Be sure that you consider what your experience will be like at a college—beyond the classroom. To grow in all ways, you will want a reasonable balance between academic rigor and an active social life. Find out what is available in terms of extracurricular activities, athletics, special interest groups. Does the community surrounding the college offer attractive outlets for students? Are students truly welcomed by the community? Is there an ethnic or religious community in which you can participate? What influence, if any, do fraternities and sororities have on campus life?

Colleges often require that you live in campus housing for one or more years. So, in considering social life, be sure to look carefully at the quality of life in the dormitories. Many colleges now offer residential-life options, such as substance-free dorms and special interest floors for students who share academic, recreational or community service interests. Others offer dormitory-based study assistance, computer facilities and counseling services. Ask if housing is guaranteed to returning students. If so, how are dormitory assignments made after the first year?

**COST:** Today's price-tag for a college education has made cost an important consideration for most students. At the same time, virtually all colleges work very hard to ensure that academically-qualified students from every economic circumstance can find the financial aid which will allow them to attend. In considering cost, look beyond the price-tag for available assistance. Decide the value of a desired educational experience and how much sacrifice (usually in terms of work and loan) you are willing to make to obtain your goals. Work closely with the financial aid officers at the colleges to which you apply.

**DIVERSITY:** You learn much from your college classmates every day—in the classroom and in activities. Consider geographic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of the student body as ways of assessing your future learning opportunities.

**RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES:** One of the best ways to measure the quality of a college or university and the satisfaction of its students is by learning the percentage of students who return after the first year and the percentage of entering students who remain to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates are indicators:

- a college and a majority of its students are well-matched
- sufficient classes and academic programs are available
- responsible academic, social and financial support systems exist for most students.



From: CHARTING YOUR COURSE FOR COLLEGE

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