

FINDING A COLLEGE THAT FITS

Many Seniors and some Juniors have been asking the Career Center how to find a college or how to narrow their list to a manageable size. There are more than 2,000 four-year schools and over 1800 two-year colleges. Sizes range from a few hundred students to over 35,000 students. This may seem overwhelming, but it helps if students identify how they feel about the following:

- **Location**—Part of the country, the size of the community, and the weather are important considerations. Find out if the weather is humid, rainy or if it will snow four months of the year. How easy is it to travel from the school back home and does this matter to the student?
- **Size**—This matters to some students and not to others. South has 1700 students. Have you felt lost in this large environment or would you prefer to be at a school of 20,000? Students at small schools are more likely to know their professors while larger schools may have classes of 200 taught by graduate students. On the other hand, larger schools generally offer more areas of study. There may be more activities and intramural offerings at large schools, but at a small school you might have more opportunities to participate.
- **Students**—Who are the students that attend and where do they come from? Do you want to experience college with many international students? What is the male/female ratio? Do students come mainly from the surrounding community and how many of them are in school full time?
- **Academics**—Does the school have the major you are considering? If you change your major are there enough other choices. Colleges have an amazing number of special offerings to consider—accelerated programs, honors colleges, dual enrollment, internships and study abroad. These should all be considered.
- **Academic challenge**—Students need to consider how they perform academically and if the school is a good fit. Attending an academically demanding college and getting all “C’s” won’t be as valuable as attending a school where you can be successful.
- **Retention and Graduation Rates**—Find out how many students return after the first year and how many years it takes them to graduate. Good retention and graduation rates are a reflection of how well the school supports students academically, socially, and financially.
- **Living options**—Is there campus housing? Are students required to live there? How many students live on campus or off campus? How hard is it to find off campus housing? Do you care if there are sororities and fraternities?
- **Extracurricular Activities**—What clubs and teams are available? Is there a fitness center? Are there off-campus options for recreation, the arts, and community service?
- **Cost**—Look beyond the price tag and investigate what scholarship and financial aid opportunities are available. Some private schools are able to offer enough financial aid to make the school comparable to a public school.