

# Questions To Ask When Choosing A College

## Academic

### **Evaluating Your High School Transcript**

While most colleges do not have grade or testing cut off points, they do publish ranges in which most of the accepted students will fall. You should discuss with your college counselor the kind of academic record you have compiled; you may also want to review a copy of your transcript to reference as you consider colleges of interest and their criteria for admissions (the College Office will mail you an unofficial copy in June of your junior year). Try to look at your transcript as an objective observer would see it. Do your grades and standardized test scores correspond? How would you explain any discrepancies there? Have outside circumstances affected your academic performance?

The answers to these questions will help you in choosing colleges where you will be successful academically and where your chances of admissions are realistic.

### **Major**

Knowing the subject(s) you will study in depth in college can help you choose the schools to which you will apply. Colleges can have from 20 to over 100 majors, and you may choose a major that you currently know nothing about. You can begin by considering which subjects you have enjoyed most at Loomis Chaffee. Ask yourself what you like to work on or learn about that might become the central interest of your college work: abstract ideas, real people and real social problems, the remote past, the next hundred years, foreign cultures, scientific or geographical discoveries?

### **How Do You Learn?**

What methods or styles of teaching engage your interests and effort the most? Are you looking for a traditional or an innovative intellectual atmosphere? Do you need a highly structured academic framework to work effectively or do you prefer a curriculum that allows for independent projects or has no requirements at all? How important is it to have dialogue with your professors? At smaller schools, you might enjoy more personal attention and better access to equipment and facilities. You may find it easier to get involved in activities outside of class. You would probably have more contact with professors and be more likely to get into the courses you want to take. Larger schools usually offer many courses in a wide variety of fields. Class sizes probably will be larger, especially lecture courses, and may be taught by teaching assistants/graduate students. Facilities and equipment are likely to be extensive, but used by many people.

A final consideration is where you want to be in relation to your peers academically. What degree of academic challenge is best for you? What balance of study, social life, and activities do you prefer? How well do you respond to academic competition? How important is it for you to perform near the top of

your college class? Is it more important to be surrounded by very capable and inquiring students even if they receive better grades than you? Would it concern you to be among the more challenged students in your class?

### **Liberal Arts or Specialized Program**

Depending on your choice of majors, one may be more appropriate for you than the other. A liberal arts and sciences education offers majors in the core academic subjects, such as English, biology, psychology, anthropology, art history, etc., but can also offer students the freedom to sample different courses/disciplines. You can study humanities, arts, languages, and the natural and social sciences and, in most cases, you won't need to declare a major for two years. The liberal arts curriculum emphasizes creative and flexible thinking, persuasive speaking and writing, and creative reasoning and complex problem-solving skills. A liberal arts education will help you understand the world around you and develop your interests, talents, and values. If you enjoy a variety of subjects and want to investigate them further, you should consider a liberal arts college.

Unlike most liberal arts colleges, technical schools or large universities offer the option of majoring in a specialized program (e.g. engineering, communications, architecture, business). These programs often narrow your field of courses from the very beginning and concentrate on training you in a particular skill area. If you are confident in your career choice, you may want to consider such a program.

While these are general descriptions of liberal arts colleges and of larger universities and/or technical schools, there is crossover. There are some liberal arts colleges that have outstanding majors in business and engineering, and there are some major universities that are tremendously strong in English or history. You might also investigate core requirements and distribution requirements, and the ease with which you can take classes in other colleges/departments within a university.

## **Personal**

In addition to considering the academic program when choosing a college, you should consider other qualities of the school (e.g. location, size, diversity of student population, social atmosphere, cost), and to do so effectively you need to understand yourself. Below are more questions that may help you determine the kind of school that is right for you:

- How far is a long way from home? Are you ready to give up the type of support your parents provide by attending games and performances at Loomis Chaffee? Are you looking to experience a new environment, different climate, unfamiliar culture or foreign country?

- Do you want to be in an urban environment, where there is easy access to the culture of the city? Do you prefer the suburbs where there is less action, but still ready access to the city? Would you be more comfortable in a rural setting where you will be away from the noise of the city and will have access to outdoor recreation and where most of the social life takes place on campus?
- Would you rather be a big fish in a small pond or vice versa? You may enjoy more attention in a small school, but you may find more diversity of activities and personalities at a large school.
- Would you consider a single-sex college? Women's institutions offer a stimulating alternative to coeducational schools. Did you know that the percentage of women who attend women's colleges and go on to receive PhD's is far greater than it is for those who attend coed schools; that women who attend women's colleges earn higher salaries on average than do women who attend coed schools; that many women's colleges have a consortium relationship with nearby coeducational schools to balance the social atmosphere?
- In what clubs, activities and sports, and on what level, would you like to participate? How important is it for you to be recognized for your talents? Does your success in sports or the arts feed your academic motivation? If so, you should focus on schools where your talents are sought after and celebrated.
- Is the diversity of the student population important to you? Would you like to go to school with people from other parts of the United States and from other countries?
- Do you want to attend a college with a particular religious affiliation? At some schools religion plays a larger role in community life than it does at others, so you may want to determine for yourself what level of involvement makes you most comfortable.
- Do you want to be a member of a fraternity or sorority? Questions to ask a college: What percentage of students participate in the Greek system? How big a role does it play in the social life of the school community? Do they have their own residential housing on campus? Do they include non-Greek members (independents) in their functions?
- What the school's policy on alcohol? Is substance-free housing available on campus?
- Are you interested in the availability of any special programs: independent study, honors programs, co-ops or internships, theme housing, study abroad, honor code, ROTC?

- What hobbies, interests and talents do you wish to develop in the next few years? Do these demand special facilities, locations, or programs?
- What aspects of your high school years have you enjoyed the most? If you could live this period again, what would you do differently? Will the colleges you are considering allow you to do that?
- What financial limitations must you take into account when planning for the next several years? What is the availability of financial aid at each of your colleges of interest? Remember that even if a particular college's tuition appears expensive, financial aid may allow its net cost to be manageable.

This is just a sampling of questions you may be asked and find yourself asking over the next few months. The more thoroughly you are able to respond, the more likely you are to choose a college that suits your current needs and future aspirations.