

Choosing the Right School for You

Just like people, schools have different personalities. You will have the best chance to succeed and graduate if the school you choose matches your personality and academic goals. Most of the information you will need to determine whether you have a good match is covered in a school's catalog or brochures. You can also find information on the Internet—many schools have Web sites. If you know others who attend or attended the school, ask for their opinion. A school counselor or potential employer may also be able to provide helpful advice.

Curriculum. Does the school offer the program of study and course you want? Do you want to take advantage of special programs, like study abroad and internships?

Quality. How much contact will you have with your instructors? Will you be taught by persons who have worked in your field of study, professors or graduate students? How involved do you want to be in research and in learning outside of the classroom?

Admission Requirements. What does the school require for admission? And what are your chances of being accepted?

Services and Activities. Does the school offer services you need such as special tutoring? Are there social activities, sports or other things that you want to be involved in?

Facilities. Are their restaurants and shops near campus? What about computer labs, libraries and research facilities? Is transportation provided on and around the campus?

Diversity. Does the mixture of students in terms of gender, religious affiliation, and ethnicity fit your needs and interests?

School and Class Size. How many students are in the classes you will be taking? Will you be on a big campus with many majors, an impressive library, and lots to do? Or is it a small campus where you know almost everyone?

Location. Is the school in an urban, suburban, or rural setting? How far is it from home?

Housing. Is there housing or must you live off-campus. What is the condition of housing and how much does it cost? Are there laundry facilities nearby? Is there a meal plan?

Safety. How safe is the campus and what is being done to protect you from crime? Schools must provide you with a summary of their annual security reports. The Department of Education posts crime statistics for many schools online at <http://ope.ed.gov/security>.

Cost. How much will tuition and books costs? Will you need any special equipment or clothing? Are there extra fees such as for using laboratories and recreational facilities?

Financial aid. What financial aid is offered? Are there opportunities to work on or near campus. What hours will you work and how much will you be paid?

Completion rates. What proportion of students graduate? Is there a large number of students who transfer to another school? Schools must give this information to you.

Loan defaults. What percentage of students who took out federal student loans later failed to repay their loans? You might not be able to get federal aid for a school that has a high default rate.

Refund policies. What are the school's refund policies? If you enroll but never begin classes, you should get most of your money back. If you begin attending classes but leave before completing your coursework, you may be able to get part of your money back.

Job placement. Does the school help you find a job after graduation? What percentage of recent graduates has been placed in jobs relevant to their course of study?