

Finding a College Match

Things to Go Over

Finding a good fit is the factor most important to your college success. What's the best way to find colleges that match your academic and personal interests? First, identify your priorities. Next, research the characteristics of a range of colleges. Finally, match these up. Here are some college characteristics for you to consider when finding your perfect match.

Majors

If you know what you want to study, look into the reputations of academic departments in that subject. Researching online is a good start. If you can talk with people who work in your field of interest to get advice on the colleges they would review, that's even better. If you're undecided on a major, pick an institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Most colleges offer advising to help you find a focus. For example, UH Mānoa has an advising center where students can go to get help with major selection, academic planning and scheduling.

Type of College

Colleges are generally either two-year or four-year. At two-year colleges, like Kapi'olani Community College, you can earn an associate degree. Most two-year colleges have an open enrollment policy, requiring only a high school diploma or equivalent. They are usually nonresidential which means students live off campus.

At most four-year colleges and universities, like University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, you can earn a bachelor's, graduate and/or professional degree. Four-year colleges tend to have larger enrollments and class sizes and offer a wide variety of majors. Colleges are also categorized as either public or private. Public colleges (such as the University of Mānoa) are funded by state and local governments, and usually charge lower tuition prices for students who live in their state. That means that the ones in your state may be more affordable for you. Private colleges (such as Hawai'i Pacific University and Chaminade University) are often more expensive because they operate independently and are privately funded. They generally have smaller class sizes.

Retention and Graduation Rates

One of the best ways to judge a college's quality and the satisfaction of its students is to find out the percentage of students who return after the first year (called the retention rate) and the percentage of entering students who stay until graduation. Good retention and graduation rates are a sign that the college has good academic, social and financial support systems for students.

Location

Do you want to visit home often, or do you see this as a time to experience a new place to live? Perhaps you like living in the city with access to shopping malls, concerts, and major league ball games. Or, maybe you would enjoy easy access to the outdoors and the serenity of a small town. Think about where you would be the most comfortable.

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Cost and Financial Aid

Today's college price tag makes cost an important consideration for most students. Keep in mind that almost every college works with its financial aid office to make sure that academically qualified students can attend. There are also many scholarships available to Hawai'i students awarded by local scholarship providers such as Hawai'i Community Foundation and the University of Hawai'i Foundation.

Size

The number of undergraduates at a college can have a big impact on your experience there. It affects the:

- Range of majors offered
- Extracurricular possibilities
- Amount of personal attention you'll receive
- Variety of academic facilities, including labs, libraries and art studios

When looking at a college's size, be sure to consider more than just the total number of students attending. For example, if you choose a small academic program within a large college, your experience might be very much like attending a small college. Investigate not just the number of faculty members, but also how accessible they are to students.

Admission Criteria

You should consider what the colleges you are interested in require for admission. Some colleges require a minimum grade point average (GPA), while others are more flexible. Find out if the colleges require admission tests, such as the SAT or ACT. You may also want to find out if you can get advanced credit or placement for Advance Placement and International Baccalaureate exams.

Campus Life

Think about what your college life will be like beyond the classroom. Most students pursue interests other than academics while they are at college. Are you interested in joining a club? Are there opportunities to join intramural sports? What about work-study or study abroad programs? Aim for a balance between academics, activities and social life. Make sure that any activity you're passionate about is available at the colleges you are considering.

Find Colleges

Here are some resources to help you get started in finding the perfect college just for you:

College Board: www.collegeboard.com

College Answer: www.collegeanswer.com