Finding Your Fit

College Research + List Building

A starting point for researching colleges, identifying your priorities, and building your first college list.

01 What Matters to You

Before researching colleges, consider what you're looking for in your college experience.

- **Academics:** What subjects interest you? A specific major, or room to explore?
- **Size + Setting:** Large or small? City, suburb, or college town? Near or far from home?
- **Campus Life:** Athletics, school spirit, clubs, Greek life, and other activities.
- **Culture:** The academic and social environment where you'll thrive.
- **Cost:** Discuss your budget and the role of financial aid and scholarships.

> **Your non-negotiables:** Identify two or three things you consider must-haves. What else is important, but negotiable?

Additional Resource — SchoolBuff: Self-reflection worksheets to help you identify your priorities, learning preferences, and non-negotiables.

02 Discover Colleges

Use these resources to identify colleges and learn more about their academics, campus life, and student experience.

RESOURCE	BEST FOR
CollegeXpress	College lists organized by interests, programs, and campus characteristics
BigFuture	Searching by majors, campus size, location, and other preferences
Fiske Guide to Colleges	Detailed college profiles covering academics, student life, and campus culture
Niche / Unigo	Student reviews and perspectives on campus life
College websites	Official information on academic programs, costs, student organizations, and virtual tours

TIP: Student reviews can offer helpful perspectives, but experiences vary. Verify important details directly with the college.

03 Build Your First List

Start with **15–20 colleges** that interest you. This is a preliminary list — no final decisions yet.

Use your college research tracker to record:

- **Basics:** Location, undergraduate enrollment, and academic programs
- **Cost:** Tuition, estimated annual cost, and financial aid opportunities
- **Why It Interests You:** Specific programs, campus characteristics, or opportunities worth exploring
- **Questions + Notes:** Anything you want to learn more about

We'll review your list together and consider academic, personal, financial, and admissions fit.

04 Take a Closer Look

Research each school more deeply: academic departments, courses, campus activities, housing, and cost. Take a virtual tour, attend an information session, or visit when possible.

As you learn more, narrow your list toward a **balanced final list of 8–12 colleges**:

TYPE	AIM FOR	WHAT IT MEANS
Reach	2–3	Admission is possible but uncertain; your academics are at or below the typical range.
Target	4–5	Your academics fall in the middle of the typical admitted student range.
Likely	2–3	Your academics are above the typical range; admission is very likely.

NOTE: Colleges admitting fewer than 15–20% of applicants are a reach for every student. Every school on your list should be one you'd be happy to attend.

Your Starting Point

- [ ] Identify your top three college priorities and any non-negotiables.
- [ ] Explore the recommended college research resources.
- [ ] Add 15–20 colleges to your research tracker.
- [ ] Label each college as a reach, target, or likely.
- [ ] Record what interests you about each school and any questions you have.

Your college list is a work in progress. Expect it to change as you learn more.