

The Ideal College—A Place That Values You for What You Have to Offer!

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Article by Peter Van Buskirk, Director of Student Advocacy at Revolution Prep

Over the last two months, I have written about elements of a good college fit—elements that are just as important when you are getting started with your college search as they are when making the final choice of a college. “Fit,” more than rankings, rhetoric or emotional logic that is bound to emerge, is the greatest determinant of success in both gaining admission and completing the degree requirements at a given college or university.

As you know by now, the best college for you will be the place that:

- Offers the course of study you want to pursue—and will provide opportunities for you to explore if you are undecided.
- Provides instruction and learning opportunities in a manner that is compatible with the way you like to learn.
- Is a good match for your level of ability *and* academic preparation.
- Provides a community that feels like home.

It is vital that you give each of these elements equal regard in your college search. A place that “feels like home” but does not offer your intended program of study is not a good fit. Nor is the place that insists that you declare your major as an applicant if you haven’t come to any good conclusions about a major yet. The best fit will be the place that meets your requirements as defined within *each* of these elements.

If you have charted your college selection around these elements of fit, you are bound to discover many places that meet your criteria. Among them, ***the best place for you—the ideal college—will be the place that values you for what you have to offer!***

Think about it. Wouldn’t you prefer to be at a college that recognizes your talents and abilities, interests and perspectives—and demonstrates its commitment to investing in your success? As you contemplate your educational experience, think about each potential college destination as a partner you might choose as you attempt to reach your goals. Do you want to commit yourself to a partner that barely acknowledges your presence or one that embraces you with a full sense of the possibilities?

Be discriminating as you look for evidence of the latter. Do you see it when you seek help in finding financial assistance? What is the response when you inquire about opportunities to pursue special independent study projects or to study abroad? Do you find yourself meeting with people who are eager to help you make things happen or are you left to figure these things out on your own? The manner in which a college engages you during the recruitment process is often an indicator of the way it will treat you as an enrolled student. In particular, colleges that value you for what you do well will:

- Give you personal attention *throughout* the recruitment process.
- Answer your questions about housing, registration and payment plans in a timely manner.
- Admit you *and* provide financial aid to meet your need.
- Recognize your talents with scholarships and/or special academic opportunities, i.e., study abroad, internships, research, etc.

Not surprisingly, this notion of “value” is evident as admission officers engage in the selective admission process as well. The question, “Who among the excellent candidates under consideration are of greatest interest to us—*who do we value most?*” frames the deliberation as highly qualified applicants are considered for limited places in the entering classes at selective institutions. Remember, such schools don’t have to admit you simply because you are good. If they admit you it is because they *chose* to do so.

The last two bullet points are especially important, then, as you apply for admission. Why? What better evidence that you have found a good college fit than to be admitted *and* extended the financial support you need in order to enroll?! The best college fit for you will be a place that seems to be saying, “*among all of the really good candidates we are considering, we want you because of what you have to offer and we’re prepared to invest in your success.*”

So, what does this mean for you? The secret to your success still rests in your ability to reflect honestly on “who you are” and “what you have to offer”—and to find a good college match for those qualities. Take stock of your gifts, talents and perspectives. What do you have to contribute to a new community and where might such contributions be valued most? Be true to yourself, then, and put yourself in a better position to experience a lasting relationship with an institution that makes sense for you.