

SELECTING A COLLEGE

Selecting a college or university for your secondary education can be a daunting task. Many questions arise in the process and the answers are not always easy to come by. Some of the considerations are important, others are not. It's not always easy to determine the difference, however thinking through the process can make the decision a rational one, as it should be. Allowing emotional factors to enter the process can lead to making the decision more difficult than it needs to be. Some, but not all, of the factors to consider are listed below. The impact of these items will be different for everyone, but these thoughts may be helpful in the final analysis.

It is important that each student undertake the process in a rational fashion, using all the resources he or she has at their disposal. School counselors, advisors, teachers, civic and tribal leaders, family members, searches on the internet, etc. should all be pursued with vigor. It is also very important to begin the process as early in your high school career as is possible. Courses selected in high school as early as the freshman year can have a bearing on the student's ability to get into the final college of choice.

IN STATE OR OUT OF STATE

Should you go to an in-state school or go out-of-state? This factor will be impacted by some of the other issues listed below. Two major benefits to staying in-state will be the proximity to home and cost. Typically, an in-state school will be a lower cost issue than out-of-state, if this is a major concern, perhaps it should be given a heavier weight in the process. Easier access to home may also be important. A college or university selection which may be a great distance from home will lead to increased costs and time for travel. Greater distances do not accommodate the need to get home frequently. This may be an individual student's preference based upon family and other considerations. Likewise, a school which is located in another part of the country, or in a large city may make the education process more difficult just because of the differences from the student's background. As a general rule, the greater the distance from home, the environment's difference from the background of the student and the population differences will make the learning experience more difficult and may adversely impact the student's performance.

COST

It can be very beneficial and is a MANDATORY process to create a budget for the college experience. Projecting all the costs involved, with help from a counselor can help determine how much money must be available for each year. This can help avoid unexpected shortfalls in cash or grants monies, thereby avoiding the possibility of running out of money during a term. Tuition, fees, books, living expenses (room and board) outside meals, travel expense, incidental expenses and personal expenses are all inputs to this equation.

The web site collegechoice.com contains a budget building model which is very useful in creating a budget and determining cost involved in attending college versus the available income. EVERY student should complete this exercise before entering college, preferably in their sophomore year in high school.

It is also advisable to know how any scholarships and/or grant monies will be paid for your benefit. If all the scholarships are payable to the college, you will need to know that the funds

may not be available for your personal use. Trying to find a part-time job in the middle of a school year may not be the most productive use of your time

The availability of summer employment may also have a bearing on this issue. How much, if any, do you think you can save over a summer. It may be worth considering staying over on campus, if you are away from home, in order to have a job.

FIELDS OF STUDY OFFERED

Many students and advisors try to have the student select a college or university undergraduate program to gain an exposure to a technical degree. While this is advisable for perhaps a four year degree program in certain engineering, Information systems pre-med, etc. programs. Under other situations, a solid generalized course of study such as liberal arts is best. Advanced degree programs for more technical fields of study can best be deferred to advanced fields of study, and a school specialized in those disciplines can be chosen. If a four year degree program is to be taken, a generalized course of study may be preferable.

ACADEMIC RATING

Care should be taken to select a school whose academic rating is strong enough to provide a solid degree and which will prove to be a benefit post-graduation. A “slough” school which has a reputation of not requiring the student to adequately perform on the academics will do a student little good in his/her career.

STRONG LIBERAL ARTS

For the average student, especially those who are not entering a technical field of study, a strong liberal arts school can be a good solution, even if a transfer later on is advised. Many enter college without a clear career direction and liberal arts can provide a good, well rounded education. Liberal arts can also be a solid program preliminarily to entering a specialized course of study through an advanced degree.

NATIVE FRIENDLY / SUPPORT

In most cases, students coming off a reservation or graduating from a small high school will find the transition from high school to a college or especially a large university will find the transition a difficult one. Not being used to the environment into which the student will be placed can create pressures and stresses which can make the change even more difficult. It is a good idea to learn about the ways, if any, that the school operates in support of Native Americans. Resources such as Indian Clubs, AISES Chapters (American Indian Science and Engineering Society) and other special programs for Natives help make the environment more friendly.

It is also worth the time and effort to check out whether or not any discounts or cost concessions are available to Native Americans at the college or university of choice. (see below)

FINANCIAL AID AVAILABILITY- (GENERAL VS. NATIVE)

One of the first things to do when applying to a college or university, as soon as the application is filed is to check with the school's Office of Financial Aid to gather whatever information is available on financial assistance of a general nature and specifically for Native Americans. There may also be aid available to students in specific courses of study. Do not treat this issue lightly. A little probing and time spent in this effort may produce handsome benefits.

SIZE-ENROLLMENT

The question of large versus small school is one which needs more consideration than is usually considered. A small school can provide a more stress-free learning environment than a large impersonal campus. This may also include the decision to attend a community or tribal college or a large state university. There is a lot to be said for attending a small local school for the first year or two before transferring to a larger university to complete a degree program, even though some course credits may be lost in the process. For many students, the culture shock of going from a small high school, especially on a reservation in a relatively remote/rural location, to a large university can be overpowering. Certainly, too large a difference in the transition from high school to college will make it more difficult for the student to make the change effortlessly and without adversely effecting the student's ability to perform at his or her best.

On the other side of the question, there are advantages to attending a larger school. More classes may be available with a broader level of diversity and subjects. It will also usually provide a broader base of students and opportunity to take advantage of exposure to a more varied environment. The choice is not always easy, but should be taken into consideration.

UNIVERSITY HOUSING

The quality and quantity of housing available to students can negatively impact the ability of a student to live in an environment which will foster a positive learning experience. The same may apply to the availability of meals. Adequate room in the student's living quarters for a sound study environment will overcome cramped or crowded living arrangements. Having to go to restaurants for meals is also a potential diversion to study habits. In this area of consideration, early visits to potential campuses and selection of school will enhance the student's ability to get the best possible arrangement for effective living and study environments.

UNDERGRAD VS. GRADUATE STUDY

Selecting a college or university for undergraduate study may not be as important as it is for study at a post-graduate level for a Master's degree or PhD program with some exceptions. Obviously, an undergraduate degree program that does not contemplate continuing into post-graduate study must require careful selection for the school at which under-graduate work will be done. Outstanding undergraduate degree programs which do not require specialized courses of study, such as Liberal Arts or Humanities Programs are generally available. Advanced courses of study, however must consider that the school should be selected based upon the quality of the advanced needs for specialization. Generalization will usually precede specialization.

For example, a school which is essentially a technical school may perhaps not be a good selection for a broad liberal arts program if that is the goal.

These issues are certainly not all inclusive and some will be more important than others in the final decision-making process to each student. It is important,, however, to keep this in mind as the student goes into the exercise. In the final analysis, each student must decide which factors are the most important to him or her and to keep focused on them for the right reasons.

NOTE:

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the writer, based upon his experience and knowledge, and do not apply to everyone. Judgment and further research should be exercised in the use/application of this and other information.