

How to Develop a College List

With more than 4,000 colleges in the U.S. alone, choosing the college where you would like to spend four years of your life after high school can seem like a daunting task. But there are steps you can take to simplify the process and to turn it into an enjoyable and satisfying experience.

Begin

Begin by making a list of colleges that seem appealing to you – brainstorm with your family and friends: consider colleges you have read about and visited; include colleges that family members and friends have attended; add colleges whose representatives have visited the school. This is only a starting point so it doesn't matter if there are too many colleges on the list or if they are too expensive or too far away. Practicality is not a necessity at this point.

If you are not able to come up with a list of 15 to 20 colleges – or, if you are, and would like to expand your initial list even further – use the Naviance system or collegeboard.com and click on “College Matchmaker.” You will immediately have access to more than 3,800 colleges and you will be able to break them down by: type of school; location; campus life; activities & sports; majors & academics; admission specifics; cost & financial aid; and deadlines. You can even link to an individual college's website from here. The fewer restrictions you make, the longer your list will be and vice versa. It is likely that some of the colleges that were on your list prior to using the Naviance system or “College Matchmaker” will appear on this list too.

Explore

When you have assembled a list of approximately 15 colleges that you would like to explore further, make a file folder for each college. Keep any information from your continuing research, including online information and brochures and catalogs, in the folders. Consider this list a “living” document that you will continually be adding to and deleting throughout the college selection process. Try to get as much information as you can for each college on your list...request information from individual colleges, attend college fairs in the area, talk to the college representatives who visit our school, visit colleges that are nearby or when you travel on vacation. Make special trips to colleges that are of particular interest to you; NEHS juniors and seniors are entitled to up to three days during the school year for approved college visits.

Refine

Thoroughly research every college on your list and eliminate all but the top 10 or 12. But do not eliminate solely on the basis of cost, as you may be eligible for a financial aid package that will make such schools affordable to you. **The ultimate goal will be to get accepted to as many colleges as possible so that you will have a wide range of choices and options.**

It is critical that, by senior year, you have refined your list so the colleges fit into three different admissions categories as they apply to you, your grades, SAT and ACT scores, and the extent to which you have prepared to meet individual college requirements and recommendations. You should choose at least one school – preferably more than one – in each of the following categories:

- **SAFE** (a school where your GPA, SAT and/or ACT scores and preparatory coursework exceed the requirements for acceptance);
- **MATCH** (a school where your GPA, SAT and/or ACT scores and preparatory coursework generally match the requirements for acceptance; and
- **REACH** (a school where you may not meet the GPA and/or SAT or ACT score requirements for acceptance but intend to use other factors such as essays, interviews, recommendations and achievements to impress admissions officials).

You also will need to decide if you will be applying “early” to any of the colleges on your list and plan your application schedule accordingly.

The process of developing a college list is ongoing and can begin as early as freshman year. It is typically considered a junior year activity and in some cases it is not begun until senior year. However, in the spirit of New Egypt’s **BLUEPRINT FOR COLLEGE** program, sophomore year is considered the optimum time for a student to begin to develop his or her college list.

(This, and other information about the college application process, is available in the Guidance Office and on the NEHS website.)