

HOW DO I GET TO THE SHORT LIST?

One of the most troublesome parts of applying to colleges is narrowing down the list of schools that are possibilities to the final short list for applications. Here are some things to consider in order to arrive at the short list:

- Make the big list of schools.
- Look at your criteria for choosing a school (e.g., big/small, urban/suburban/rural, close/far, etc.). Eliminate the schools on your big list that do not meet your criteria.
- Separate the long list of schools into groups: reach, match & safety. Make sure you are honest with yourself about whether a school is truly a match or a safety. Some schools are reach schools for everyone.
- Look at the schools that are similar; similar schools will most likely give you similar responses; can you eliminate a few more?
- With your parent(s), look at the financial aid piece. You will want to keep notes on this. Who gives merit scholarships versus only need-based aid? Who gives out aid in the form of loans versus grant money? Try to look at your safety schools with an eye for scholarship money. Sometimes colleges will award merit money based on your test scores and they will post that information on the financial aid site.
- Eliminate the schools that do not meet your needs financially (mom/dad should complete a FAFSA/CSS Profile based on their most recent tax return in order to see what the Expected Financial Contribution (EFC) will be. Do not eliminate schools just because they only award need-based aid. If your family can manage the amount that is expected for the EFC, you should expect that need-based aid is truly need-based aid. Please understand that most colleges expect that parents contribute a significant amount for the EFC.
- Some schools award merit money based on scholarship competitions. Take time to look at the profiles of the students who won those competitions in the past. Does your profile make you a competitive applicant?
- After you eliminate the schools that are probably not great bets financially, then take another look at your list. What schools have real strengths in the programs in which you are most interested? Can you eliminate a few more from the list?
- Consider the other factors if you apply to and are accepted at the schools still on your list. Will you be able to have a car on campus? Many campuses limit freshmen in terms of having a car on campus. Will you need to fly home or will your parents need to pick you up for breaks? What will the additional costs be for moving, breaks and hotels if your school is far away? Will you most likely be in a dorm room with one roommate or three?
- Look at the standardized testing piece. Which schools allow ACT only or ACT with writing only or want SAT with SAT II's? Select the schools where your test scores will appear to be strongest. Remember to check the testing requirements once the new applications are posted since schools do change their policies annually.
- If possible, consider visiting the colleges on your remaining list that you do not know much about or you have not visited before. Most likely, you can eliminate a few more schools after visiting. Sometimes the campus visits can help you define your criteria for a college. That is why it is very important to visit schools.
- Many schools post their applications during the summer. Start making folders for the schools you know for sure that you are applying to—make checklists with deadlines for everything that must be done for the schools and keep that list inside the folder. As you complete an item, mark it off.

- Application time: start with a safety school for your first application. The first application is the most difficult because everything is new. If you have kept a brag sheet or resume, doing the applications will be easier. Try to tailor the applications specifically to each school. Once you start the application process, oftentimes, you will see how much work is involved and toss out some schools in the process.
- Application limits: Some parents (and schools) limit the number of applications. Schools rarely set limits, but with the ease of the Common Application and some college management software programs (e.g. Naviance), applying to more schools becomes easier. Some parents set limits on how many schools a child is allowed to apply to because the application fees can add up. Before the application process starts, make sure you know whether or not your school limits the number of applications and how many your parent(s) are willing to allow. Some parents may say that they will pay for so many and that a teen must pay for the rest out of his or her bank account. This process also helps eliminate schools since the student will typically apply to the ones s/he is most interested in first and save the “maybes” for later.
- Applications can take a lot of time if the results are of quality and present the candidate in the best light. Try to limit activities or work hours in the early fall so there is plenty of time to complete applications. Schools need time to process applications and recommenders need time as well, so make sure you do not wait until the last minute to submit items. Many people recommend that application materials are in to a guidance office and teacher recommender(s) one month in advance of the real deadline for the college.