

Students preparing for college should follow these tips when applying

Choosing where to apply to college is a big decision that can affect the lives of young students for years to come. The college application process can have more immediate impacts as well, as U.S. News reported that the average college application fee was \$41 in the spring of 2015, meaning families can expect to spend several hundred dollars just to apply to colleges.

The rising cost of a college education coupled with a competitive job market only serve to emphasize the importance high school students and their families must place when deciding where to apply. The following are a handful of strategies families can employ to make students' decisions regarding where to apply to college a little easier.

1. Don't hesitate from applying to a dream school. The Princeton Review defines dream schools as those colleges or universities where a student's academic credentials fall in the low end or below the school's averages for students accepted the year prior. But even students who meet the academic requirements established by their dream schools may be hesitant to apply to such schools because of the cost of tuition.

Students whose academic records fall just short of their dream schools' criteria or whose financial means make attending their dream schools seem impossible should still apply to those schools. Financial aid might be available, and schools might look at more than just academic performance, par-



Applying to colleges may be daunting, but the right choice may affect a student's life for the next four to six years.

ticularly for students whose grades fall just short of last years' average accepted applicants.

2. Don't be deterred by application fees. Stanford University's application fee for 2017 was \$90, making the school one of the more expensive colleges or universities to apply to. But many schools, including Stanford, waive those fees for certain applicants. Students should not expect each school to waive their application fees, but they also should not let those fees deter them

from applying, especially if they meet or exceed the application requirements.

3. Choose the right safety school. Safety schools are those colleges or universities where applicants' academic credentials make them a near certainty to gain admission. But when choosing safety schools, students should pick schools that they would enjoy attending. Applying to a school simply because you can get in and not because you want to enroll there can make for an unpleasant college experience

should you ultimately end up attending that college.

Only 60 percent of college freshmen will graduate within 6 years according to the latest report from the National Center for Educational Statistics. That's pretty scary stuff for college-bound students — especially if loans are part of the financial formula.

Even for those students who make it to graduation, there may be some question as to whether they made the most

of their time on campus.

As this University of Florida senior reflects, "The problem with college is that you figure it out about the time you're ready to graduate."

Here, some students offer tips on making the most of your time at college:

- "Gather all the syllabi during the first week of classes and write down the due date for every single paper, project, test or whatever. You'll see instantly which weeks are potential killers." — Junior, Wake Forest

- "Sitting in a classroom is the easiest part of college and it cuts study time in half. Why make it hard on yourself? GO!" — Senior, University of Iowa

- "What separated me from the masses was 'connecting' with a faculty member. I didn't even know what the possibilities were until he laid out a 'road map' and showed me a few shortcuts to get there. When my confidence was shaky, he reminded me that I could do it." — Graduate, University of Michigan.

- "Pick the professor, not the time of day." — Junior, Duke University

- "Get a job in the office of your major. You'll get to know everyone from the secretaries to the dean, all of whom can be very helpful. If any great opportunities come along, you'll be the first to know." — Senior, Indiana University

- "There's no reason to fail! There are people here to help and it's free. Actually, you've paid for it so you might as well use it." — Senior, Michigan State University.

Did You Know?

While high school seniors on the cusp of graduating and moving on to college give ample thought to their college majors, many are likely to change majors at least once after enrolling in a college or university. According to the University of La Verne, between 50 and 70 percent of college students change majors at least once, and many of them will change their majors three times before they graduate. The University also reports that 50 percent of college graduates pursue careers that are not related to their majors. Career and personality assessments can help students determine which subjects they may want to study upon enrolling in a college or university. Such assessments can help students discover their interests, and then students can work with advisors and career counselors at their colleges or universities to find majors that align with those interests. High school seniors on their way to college in the coming months can rest easy that, even if they don't know what to study when they arrive on college campuses this fall, many of their fellow freshmen are equally uncertain.

Things to know about returning to school

Upon taking inventory of their lives at the start of a new year, some people entertain thoughts of returning to school.

Adults who decide to return to school after a long layoff are following a popular path. According to the education resource Education Corner, a growing number of career colleges and vocational training schools now offer bachelor's and graduate degree programs geared toward working adults.

People return to school for various reasons, including the chance to learn new skills or further develop their existing skills. Some return to school because they are changing careers,

while others may have lost a job or desire a promotion and feel that attaining a higher level of education or new skills can make reaching that goal more likely.

Adults who hope to return to school might be surprised to learn that the educational landscape has changed considerably since they were last in a classroom.

- College students are no longer just young men and women who begin pursuing degrees right out of high school. In fact, the number of adults returning to the classroom has increased considerably, often making younger students the exception rather than the rule, says the col-

lege financial planner Straighter Line. According to the U.S. Department of Education, college students 25 years or older comprise 40 percent of all students enrolled in college.

- Adults who are thinking about returning to school are urged to fill out the free applications for student aid to see if they qualify. Grants and scholarships may be available, and some workers find that employers may match funds or offer some assistance to finance job training courses.

- Many schools now offer online courses that make it easier for working adults to pursue their degrees.



As working adults are returning to school to pursue new or advanced degrees, more colleges and universities are facilitating such pursuits.

Visit fafsa.ed.gov to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online.

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