

HOW TO CREATE A GREAT COLLEGE LIST

This post was informed by podcast episode 109 with Steven Antonoff (Author, COLLEGE MATCH and THE COLLEGE FINDER) and episode 110 with Ted Fiske (Author, THE FISKE GUIDE TO COLLEGES). You can hear those episodes by clicking [here](#) and [here](#).

Good news: there are more than 4,500 colleges and universities in the US. Even better news: most schools accept most students, with the national average at 65.8% in 2014 ([source](#)). But which of the 4,500 is right for you? High school counselors can be a wonderful support during the college process and many specialize in developing college lists. There are also many private counselors who can help you develop a list and, if you can afford to hire one, I recommend it, and [here's why](#) I think that's a good idea. (Find one near you [here](#) and [here](#).) But if your high school counselor is too busy and you can't afford a private counselor, this article will show you how to develop a great list online, for free. There are two parts to this process:

Part 1: How do I figure out what I'm looking for?

When I asked Steven Antonoff, who literally wrote [the book](#) on this process, for the best way for a student to discover college preferences if they were to spend only one hour, he advised going somewhere quiet, like the top of a mountain, and really thinking about two things: who you are and what do you want? That could work, if you have a mountain nearby.

But if you don't happen to have a mountain nearby, I recommend the 80-question "Self-Survey for the College Bound" in Steven's book, [COLLEGE MATCH](#), and not because he is paying me to say that but because it is awesome. But say you're too unable to buy the book (or just too lazy) and just want the worksheet? Get this: [he gives it away on his website](#).

[Click here to download the Self-Survey for the College Bound.](#)

And if you want to learn more about yourself, use these:

[College Planning Values Assessment](#)

[Self-Knowledge Questionnaire](#)

[Qualities That Will Make a College Right for You](#)

[Activities and Experiences Worksheet](#)

These aren't meant to be exhaustive, says Dr. Antonoff, but instead meant to start a conversation. Complete these exercises over the course of an afternoon and you'll have begun that conversation.

What are some other ways to get to know your interests and preferences?

Dr. Antonoff and I both like [DO WHAT YOU ARE](#) and I'm a big fan of [YouScience](#). I also recommend the "Sizing Yourself Up" section at the start of the Fiske Guide to Colleges (more on that in a moment) and on the podcast, Dr. Antonoff mentions a half-dozen other great self-exploration tools, including Knowdell's card sort, the True Colors survey, and O*NET online, all of which you'll find links to on the show notes page [at this link](#).

Once you've spent some time thinking about your interests and preferences, it's time to start thinking about...

Part 2: Where do I start finding schools?

Use [collegeexpress.com](#) to search according to your interests.

Why College Express? Because after 30 years spent eating, sleeping and breathing colleges, Steven Antonoff published his amazing set of lists in his book [THE COLLEGE FINDER](#) (which I recommend if you like reading books with actual pages) but they are available (and searchable!) at [www.collegeexpress.com](#). So you can type in anything from "Schools for the Free Spirit" to "Great Private Colleges for the B Student" and you'll get results. It's pretty much my favorite resource ever.

Another thing I love is that Steven doesn't rank schools, which is pretty tough to do anyway.



Here, I'll make it even easier for you. Check out THE AMAZING COLLEGE LIST below. All the links are clickable.

I'm interested in studying...

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Automotive | Education | Humanities | Music |
| Anthropology | Engineering | Interior Design | Outdoor Studies |
| Aviation | English | International Relations | Photography |
| Biology | Entrepreneurship | Hospitality Management | Physics |
| Chemistry | Ethnic Studies | Journalism | Political Science |
| Computer Science | Equestrian | Landscape Architecture | Psychology |
| Criminal Justice | Film | Law | Religious Studies |
| Culinary Arts | Finances | Liberal Arts | Robotics |
| Dance | Fashion | Marine Science | Sociology |
| Dentistry | Foreign Language | Mathematics | Theater |
| Ecology | Graphic Design | Medicine | Voice |
| Economics | History | Meteorology | World Business |

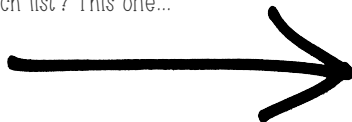
Click any of the links to go directly to the list

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| Colleges for Specialized Majors | Colleges Giving Academic Grants | Colleges with Unusual Majors |
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| Expert-Chosen Unknown College Gems | Colleges Going Green | Colleges for Video Game Lovers |
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| Most Christ-Centered Colleges | Colleges with the Most Peace Corps Volunteers | Most Beautiful College Campuses |
| Colleges with Meditative Spaces | Alma Maters of Astronauts | Colleges for Creative Writers |
| Colleges with Most Devoted Sports Fans | Colleges to Consider for Online Learning | Top Ten Activist Schools |
| Colleges Most Tolerant of Different Perspectives | Gay-Friendly Colleges | Colleges with Campus Spirit |
| Colleges for Socially Awkward Students | Colleges for the Most Fun-Loving | Broad-Minded Colleges |
| College Promoting Internationalism | Private Colleges for the Underachiever | Colleges for the Independent Learner |
| College with a Strong Sense of Community | Colleges Making a Difference | Colleges Offering Community Service Scholarships |
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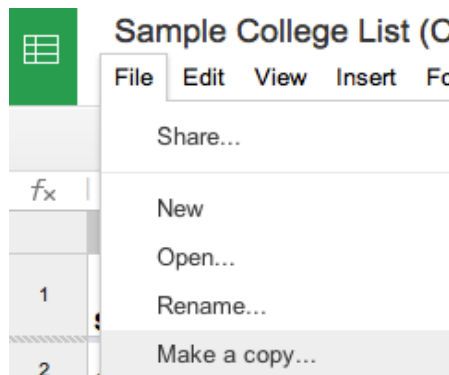
What do I do next?

1. Notice which colleges are coming up repeatedly.

Example: maybe you've never heard of Brandeis, but you see it on the lists for "Colleges with Excellent Political Science Programs," "Colleges with Fine Music Programs," and "More Colleges for Creative Writers" (and you want to major in Poly Sci, you play the violin and like to write poems in your spare time). Put in our list. Which list? This one...



2. Make a copy of [this Google spreadsheet](#). How? Go to "File" and click "Make a copy..."



3. Type your list of schools into that doc, like this:

	SCHOOL	general % acceptan	How many students?	How many students?
2	Site		x	x
3	Login/password		x	x
4	REACH	1-24%	ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:	
5	Amherst	12%	1800	
6	Wesleyan	20%	3200	
7	Tufts	21%	around 10,000	
9	MAYBE	25-75%		
10	Brandeis	39%	around 5,000	
11	Hampshire College	63%	1500	
12	Mt. Holyoke	42%	2400	
13	Emerson College	48%	4500	
14	Boston College	28%	13000	
15	MATCH	76-100%		
16	Wheaton College	64%	1600	

Share this list with anyone who is helping you (your counselor, friend, or parent) using the "Share" button in the top right corner. And list a bunch, like 15-20. You'll whittle it down. How? Through research.



Any favorite sites for researching schools?

Stay on www.collegeexpress.com and type in the school name. Then click “Lists” to see what other lists that school is on.

For the pro perspective, go to collegecountdown.com where for \$20 you can get online access to the [Fiske Guide to Colleges](#), which is (ask any counselor) the go-to guide for college research. This \$20 is optional, but totally worth it. Why else should you get this book? You’ll find out in podcast episode #110, which you can [listen to here](#).

For the student perspective, go to unigo.com where you can read real students’ opinions on their schools. But don’t just read 1-2 reviews, read a bunch of them, in particular the “What’s the stereotype of students at your school?” and “Is the stereotype true?” You’ll get a sense of the school vibe pretty quick.

How many schools should I apply to?

Pick ten schools. Why ten? Because that allows you to divide your list like this:

- 1 Wild Card (1%-10% chance)
- 3 Low Chance of Acceptance (11%-25% chance)
- 3 Medium Chance of Acceptance (26%-60% chance)
- 3 High Chance of Acceptance (61%+ chance)

Keep searching and researching until you’re in love with all nine – yes, even the “match” schools where you’ll likely get in. (Bonus tip: If you’re applying to the University of California schools, count them as one, since the application and essays will be the same for all of them.)

How do I know my chances of getting in?

You can find the general acceptance rates on many sites, but I recommend using parchment.com.

Why Parchment? Because you can enter more specific info on yourself: in addition to GPA and test scores, you can also add extra info--extracurriculars, leadership, hardship--basically details that will give you a slightly more accurate sense of how you compare. How much more accurate? It’s tough to say, but it will give you at least a sense of whether it’s a low/medium/high chance of acceptance or a Wild Card.

Why trust Parchment? Because it’s the transcript-sending service for many thousands of students--both when they’re sending the initial transcripts and when they send the final transcript, confirming students’ acceptance--so the site knows who was actually accepted where (because in many cases they send the final transcripts to the schools where students ultimately enroll).

Colleges For Students Studying...

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[Where Anthropology PhDs Received Their Undergraduate Degrees](#)

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[Biology](#)

[Business](#)

[Chemistry](#)

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[Medicine](#)

[Meteorology](#)

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