



## CHOOSING THE PERFECT UNIVERSITY FOR YOU!

When factoring in all of the details involved in picking a University, many students don't know where to start. It can be daunting! But don't worry—alarming yourself like that is unnecessary. Not every detail is crucial. A number of criteria should play a part in choosing where YOU want to go to school, but not all of them are weighted equally. Some aspects of the school you choose should be more critical than others.

It's up to you to decide which aspects of your dream university are most important and then find a school that most closely mirrors what you want out of your university experience. Here is a list of eight basic factors to consider when choosing a university:

### 1. Major

If you already know what you're interested in majoring in then this one is easy. You can narrow down your list of potential universities by only looking at those that offer your major or family of majors. If you haven't decided on a major, then consider the next seven options and try to leave yourself as much room as possible to explore.

### 2. Academics

Academics should be the key factor in your university search – this is the primary reason you're going to university. But you need to decide what is the best academic environment for you to thrive. It's great to be in a competitive environment, but if you think you won't be able to keep up, you should look for schools that won't put you under too much pressure. On the other hand, if you're looking to be challenged, search for schools that are known for being academically rigorous.

Also, lots of universities offer an Honors Program to attract students looking for a more rigorous environment at traditionally less rigorous universities.

#### Questions to ask:

- Am I looking for a school with a very intellectual/scholarly emphasis? Or am I looking for more of a balance between the intellectual/social sides of campus life?
- Am I ready/able to handle the most rigorous academic environment? Or would “normal” academic pressure be better for me?

Do I need to consider any of the following:

- Learning Centers/Tutoring
- Internships
- Hands on learning opportunities
- Programs for students with learning style differences
- Counseling/psychological/medical services
- Excellent study abroad programs
- Research opportunities
- Personalized academic advising

### 3. Location

You should have a general idea of where you want to go off to study and live for the next four years or at least which places are tolerable. This isn't a big deal to some people but to others there are very clear YES or NO locations. Either way is fine, but this helps you refine your list.

#### Questions to ask:

- How far from home are you comfortable with? How about your parents?
- Do you want to go to school in a big city, small city, suburban or in a rural area?
- Do you want a campus school or city school? (FYI: There are campus schools in cities)
- Are you open to cold weather? Snow?

### 4. Size

Think about how the size of your university will impact your experience. A large university (more than 15,000 undergraduates) means lots of people to socialize and interact with, but you might have to sit in a lecture with 100 students. If you want to have a closer relationship with your professors, you may want to look at universities with a high student-faculty ratio.

#### Questions to ask:

- What size classes are more likely to result in you receiving good grades, small or large?
- Which type of classroom environment is right for me: discussion classes or lectures?
- Do I want to intimately discuss ideas and interact with the instructor and the other students?
- Do I need a close knit, family-like environment to thrive?

### 5. Atmosphere/Student Life

Are you looking for a party school with lots of nightlife or do you appreciate more quiet fun? Do you like small campuses where everyone knows one another or big campuses with (often) more diversity? Are you looking for a more conservative or liberal environment. Make sure these are offered at the universities you're looking at. These questions are important to keep in mind when looking for schools. Social media and current students are great research tools. It's useful to hear opinions from real students who aren't trying to sell you admission.

#### Questions to ask:

- Is it important for me to have other students from Trinidad here?
- What does support look like for International students?
- Is religious life an important factor for me in choosing a university?
- Is it important that I attend a university where many students share my racial heritage?
- Would I prefer a single sex university?

## 6. Sports and On-Campus activities

Are you a huge sports fan? Is it important to you to go to a Division 1 school with a great sports program? Some schools have top American football or basketball teams that are very exciting to watch. As an athlete, are you looking to play competitive sports in school? Club sports can be a great way to meet other students, to exercise and have fun! Think about other activities you want to get involved in, either relating to your major, to develop leadership skills, to give back or just to be social. Most universities have hundreds of clubs, even small universities, so think about what you would like to pursue and include this in your search criteria.

## 7. Admission Difficulty

How strong of a candidate am I for admission? In this highly competitive environment, you must be familiar with the academic, test and other requirements each university requires and feel comfortable that you are “above average” in all areas to make the best use of your time and money during the admissions process.

## 8. Cost and Financial Aid

In a perfect world we wouldn't have to worry about cost when it comes to education. Unfortunately, price is a **significant** factor in many students' university searches. Most families can't afford to pay full price for a university education. Look into the financial aid policies at the schools you're considering applying to.

### Questions to ask:

- Does this University provide financial aid to international students? Merit aid and Need based aid?
- Can International students get work-study jobs on campus?