

Sizing Up Colleges Big vs. Small

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

As you begin your college search, one of the first decisions you need to make and one that helps narrow your list is what size college you want to attend. U.S. Colleges offer many options, from small colleges with fewer than 1,000 students to a large state university with more than 35,000 students. What's best for you depends a large part on your personality and academic goals.

THE BIG COLLEGE EXPERIENCE



Do you picture yourself at a university that offers everything from televised sporting events to countless degree programs? Are you itching to break free of the high school fishbowl and enjoy the anonymity that comes with being one of thousands of students? Then a large school might be a good fit for you. Here are some of the benefits associated with big colleges. (Keep in mind that these may not be true of all these colleges.):

- Greater variety of majors and scholarships
- Large-sized classes, which means they won't fill up as fast
- Multiple housing options
- Nationally recognized sports programs
- Wide range of academic choices, clubs, and extracurricular activities
- Greater number of faculty members
- A large study body, which means more social events
- A more extensive alumni network

THINGS TO CONSIDER



If you want to succeed at a big college, it's best to know what subjects or general areas you're interested in pursuing. Part of success in college is being involved in campus life and experiencing the many opportunities available. Introductory classes at a large college may contain hundreds of students. Some students find this environment exciting. Others feel overwhelmed. Here's another point to consider. If you're attracted to a college because of its famous faculty, find out how many classes are actually taught by renowned professors rather than their teaching assistants. Administrative red tape is something to think about, and large colleges tend to have a lot of it. For example, enrolling in a course that's not a requirement for your major may involve multiple signatures and approvals.

THE SMALL COLLEGE EXPERIENCE



Do you enjoy personal attention from teachers and advisers? Then a small college may be just what you need. Some students find that a smaller setting is a cozier and charming fit.

Here are some of the benefits associated with small colleges. (Keep in mind these may not be true of all of them.):

- Small class sizes
- Hands-on learning opportunities
- Individually designed majors
- Strong advising system with advisers who know students well
- Strong sense of community
- Professors, not teaching assistants, teaching most courses
- Opportunity to get to know professors well

THINGS TO CONSIDER



Small colleges don't offer as many majors as big colleges; however, some of them let you design your own. Courses at small colleges are usually taught by professors, not teaching assistants. The professors may even know your name and areas of interest. Be aware that small colleges don't have the research facilities of large universities. If you're hoping to be a research assistant, find out what kind of work and facilities are available before you apply. Although you'll find a robust social life at most small colleges, you'll find less in terms of big sporting events and variety. However, there's often a stronger sense of community and connection.

START YOUR SEARCH

Whether you're considering a big university, a small college, or something in between, you need to review your options carefully and determine what's most important to you. Remember that college size is one of many factors to consider as you build your college list. Use [College Search](#) to research two-year and four-year colleges and find the size that meets your needs.