



AIKENHEAD PAINTER  
COLLEGE CONSULTING

# Building a Strong & Balanced College List

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So many schools, so many choices. The process seems overwhelming with too many options - and so much uncertainty.

Take heart, with over 4000 colleges and universities to choose from in the United States and scores more in Europe, most students find multiple schools that are great fits.

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## Best Fit vs Best Brand thinking: Casting a Wide Net

Students tend to focus on school selectivity. The more competitive, the better, right? Not necessarily. The real question: is this the "best" school for you?

Highly selective schools have rigorous academic programs, renowned professors and extensive research opportunities - plus the cachet of a name brand school. However, these same qualities are also available at lesser known and/or less competitive colleges.

Use these schools, along with more competitive ones, to create a strong and balanced list, and cast a strategically wide net.

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## FIVE CRITICAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

### Location, Location, Location

Urban vs rural, close to home vs far away vs very far away, regional preferences, climate & cultural considerations: what works for you?

### Program / Faculty Strengths

Major requirements: do the required courses line up with your interests? Is the department faculty known for teaching, research, accessibility? Do they hold terminal degrees in their fields?

Click [HERE](#)  
to see 5  
more  
factors to  
consider!



### School Size

Smaller schools often have smaller classes, high engagement with professors, and a more personal approach. Larger schools tend to have more research, more majors, more choices in activities.

### Cost/Debt

Use [College Navigator](#) as a research tool. Investigate Cost of Attendance and use the Net Price Calculators. Pay attention to average debt for students who borrow.

### Social scene:

Many schools boast a long list of clubs and organizations. How many are robust and active? Are you eligible/likely to participate? What percent of social life is Greek? Look at diversity data.

Honestly assess your academic record: GPA, Rigor of coursework (AP, Honors, Dual Enrollment, IB), Standardized test results. Consider your performance in your core academic classes.

## RESEARCHING SCHOOLS

**School Website** Best for info on majors, faculty, cost of attendance, and student life.

### College Reference books

Fiske Guide to Colleges  
Colleges That Change Lives  
Princeton Review: Complete Book of Colleges  
College Finder

### Campusreel

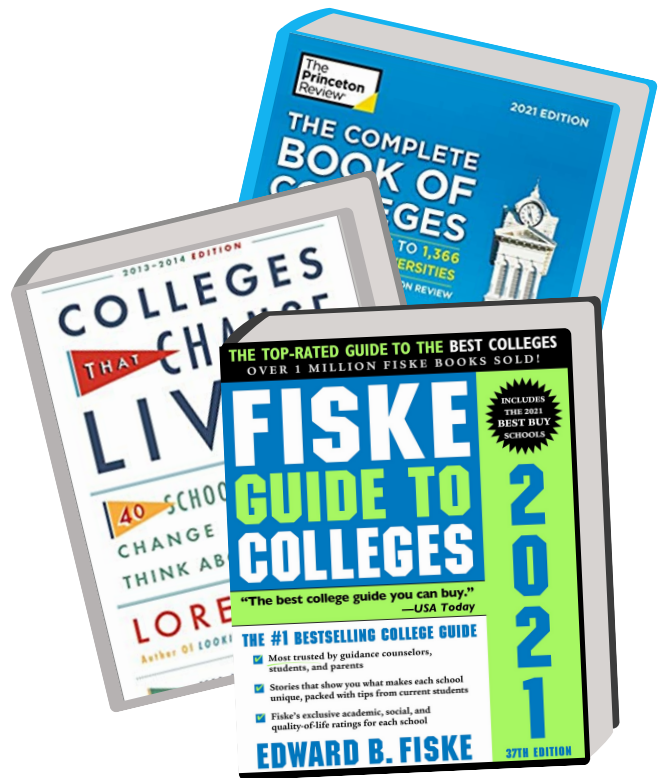
Provides video tours of campuses

### Induck college impressions

Gives short pros and cons of the school as well as complete interviews of students. Fee based subscription.

### Common Data Set

Collaborative data gathered by the higher education community to one centralized source. This data is raw and therefore you are able to interpret it for yourself.



**Search engines** Plug in your GPA, major interests, test scores (if available), geographic area and get new ideas! Sometimes it is better to search by one variable at a time for a wider net.

- [College Navigator](#)
- [College Factual](#)
- [College Board/Big Future](#)
- [College Data](#)
- [College Simply](#)
- [CollegeXpress](#)

# Crafting a Balanced List

Balance your list with a majority of schools in the Target range and 1-2 in the Likely and Reach categories. High Reach schools need not be included for a balanced list, but should be recognized and understood as such. Keep a college's "**Admitted Student Profile**" in mind when assessing your admissibility.

**Likely:** Your academic and testing profile is significantly above the school average and admit rate is above 50%

**Target:** Your profile is similar to the school average and admit rate is above 30%

**Reach:** Your profile is below the school average but not significantly and/  
or admit rate is below 30%

**High Reach:** The school has an extremely low admit rate, making it a reach for most applicants

**Financial Safety:** An important inclusion and ideally is also a "Likely" school.

## A BALANCED LIST

LIKELY	TARGET	REACH	HIGH REACH
1-2	3-6	1-3	0-1

Keep in mind: **every** school on the list is important. Love every school you add, including the targets and likelies.

## HOW MANY SCHOOLS ON THE LIST

**10-13 schools is a reasonable number** for a solid list. Usually, this is whittled down from a much larger list, as the student learns more about the schools and themselves. However, sometimes students have significantly larger or smaller lists.

### RISKS OF APPLYING TO A FEW SCHOOLS

**No acceptances** Be sure your short list includes Likely schools.

**Not affordable** Be sure to include a financial safety.

**Not happy** with the limited acceptances. Be sure you love the schools on your list.



### IMPLICATIONS OF APPLYING TO MANY SCHOOLS

**Supplemental Essays** Schools place more importance on supplemental essays as a way of understanding a student's commitment to and fit with the college. You may be writing a lot!

**Costs** Many schools charge an application fee ranging from \$40-\$80.

**Multiple Application Formats** Be aware of the school's application. A longer list increases the chance you will complete multiple types of applications (e.g. common app, state university specific, private school specific, coalition application).

# TRUE OR FALSE? TAKE THE QUIZ!



A GPA of 4.0 or higher is all you need for highly selective schools

Private schools accept a wide range of students

**T/F**

Public Schools are easier to get into than private school

Completing the FASFA is recommended for all students

The school with the lowest tuition rate is always the cheapest option

Applying to more schools will increase your chance of acceptance

**Check out the answers HERE**



AIKENHEAD PAINTER  
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- Standardized Test strategies
- College list development
- Essay support & editing
- Application guidance
- Interview prep
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*First consultation complimentary*