

Finding Your **Way** To College

So you want to go to college, but aren't sure where?
There are so many options that it's easy to feel overwhelmed.
But a few simple questions can help you get started:

1.

What do I want to learn in college?

Some people are there to learn skills that help them get or keep a job. Others love learning and want take classes. Some people aren't sure why they want to go to college, but know their families expect it. Think about matching your goals to what sort of college you want to attend.

2.

How long do I plan to be in college?

Are you prepared to spend four, five, or even six years working on a degree? Or do you need something shorter, so you can get to work and perhaps come back later? Take a look at which colleges offer a timeline that suits you.

3.

What can I afford to pay?

Is someone helping you pay for college? Do you have a job or plan to get one? Are you counting on financial aid, or maybe even private scholarships? Different colleges give students different options, so find the right fit.

Types of **Colleges**

Depending on what you want to do, what you can pay, and how long you plan to stay, one of these options may be right for you.

Community
College

Public
Colleges and
Universities

Private
Colleges and
Universities
(non-profit)

For-profit colleges should be avoided. Very few of them offer a good education at a good price. In fact, most students who start at for-profit colleges never finish their degrees and have debt they struggle to pay off. Rule of thumb: rule them out.

How to *Decide*

If you want to get a certificate or degree that will take a few years to complete, go to **community college**.

- Community colleges offer a huge array of majors and programs, including training to help you get specific job skills.
- You can go to community college to finish high school or learn English. You do not have to have a high school diploma to apply.
- You can start working on a bachelor's degree at community college and transfer to another college later.
- Financial aid is limited at community colleges, so you will likely still need to work and/or borrow to cover your living expenses.
- You need to apply to and register at community college, but everyone gets in.



If you want to get a bachelor's degree and are ready to commit to four or more years of further education, apply to both **public and private four-year colleges and universities**.

- State universities and private colleges come in many sizes.
- In some states, the public colleges and universities are very inexpensive as tax dollars are used to keep tuition low for residents, but some are as expensive as private colleges.
- Sometimes private colleges offer more financial aid than public colleges.
- Remember that tuition often rises each year so be sure your strategy for paying for college will last the entire time you'll be in college—and know that for many students a bachelor's degree takes more than 4 years to complete.
- You have to apply to and be accepted by a four-year college before you can begin there.

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