

# Choosing the Right College at the Right Price

"Mom and Dad, can I go to Harvard? It says on their website it only costs \$43,655 a year." Mom gasps and drops to the couch. Dad, always the pragmatist, responds glibly, "You'd hate the cold winters there. How about Pima Community College? You could continue to live at home, and tuition is only \$46 a credit hour!"

With one son a recent graduate of the University of Arizona, another a senior at the University of Colorado, and a 13-year old daughter eyeing the East Coast, let me share with you my top five tips for choosing the right college, at the right price, for your kids.



**1. Making the Grade.** If you want to attend a more prestigious school, grades and SAT scores are critical. A "D" average student isn't going to get into an Ivy League school, plain and simple. The college registrar can tell you what the average and low GPA and SAT scores were for last year's admissions. Call and ask them.

**2. Paying the Freight.** While checking on admission standards, find out the costs of tuition, books, and room and board. How much can you afford and how much is your child willing to take on in debt? There is a lot to be said for the low cost and less drastic transition that a local public community college offers. Similarly, even with the rising tuition at Arizona universities, the cost for in-state residents is significantly less than attending out of state virtually anywhere. Investigate early what scholarships and other financial aid is available at the schools you are

considering and how, and when, to apply for that support.

**3. Whattaya Wanna Be When You Grow Up?** My youngest son knew when he was a junior in high school that he wanted to be an engineer. His case for attending Colorado was strengthened by the fact that 17 astronauts have graduated from their engineering program. Schools have a reputation for particular courses of study. Northern Arizona University has Hotel Management and Forestry. Arizona State is known for Aerospace Engineering and Journalism. And the University of Arizona has excellent programs in the Sciences and Liberal Arts, as well as a nationally recognized program for college students with Attention Deficit Disorder.

**4. Narrow the Field.** Applying to multiple schools is time-consuming and costly. Try to narrow your

choices to fewer than 10, including two "safety nets"—schools where you are certain to be accepted—and two "reaches." Study their websites and visit the schools, preferably a scheduled orientation visit, during a time when school is in session.

**5. The Early Bird and the Worm.** Apply early, in the fall of your child's senior year if you can. Some schools offer early admission and even if they don't, the sooner you apply, the sooner you are likely to learn if you have been accepted and the earlier you can start applying for financial aid. Early acceptance means you're likely to secure the best dorm, and can enroll in pre-orientation programs that ease the transition and often give you a jump on pre-registering for classes.

— Ted Schmidt

An excellent resource for teens and their parents considering college is at [http://www.quintcareers.com/teen\\_college.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/teen_college.html), where everything from career assessment tests, financial aid resources, finding the right school, and the latest on the SAT can be found.

Or try a resource like the Big Book of Colleges 2007 that lists every college in the country, with details on their courses, student body, faculty, acceptance ratios, SAT scores... everything.

