

Creating Your Balanced College List



One of the most important steps in the college admissions process is deciding which schools to apply to. For high school freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, it's never too early to think about where they might want to apply. Doing some in-depth research can help students determine what they may want in their higher education experience, but what exactly goes into creating a balanced college list?

When preparing to apply to college, students should create a balanced list of reach, target, and likely schools that are a good academic, social, and financial fits. There are a number of factors to consider when choosing which colleges to put on your college list., To set your application journey off on the right foot.

Top Success Tips

Research

We've said it before, and we'll say it again – students must conduct extensive research on several colleges in order to

choose and apply to a balanced list of schools. In addition to helping you refine your choices, down the road, this research will also enable you to personalize your applications supplements and communicate to an admissions committee why you want to attend that school. Research prospective schools with as many sources as possible, including websites, college guidebooks, current students and alumni, and college visits. As you do your research, purge any schools from your list that do not meet your needs. Ideally, you will end up with a list of 10 to 15 best-fit schools – each of which you would be happy to attend!

How well do you know your High School Counselor?

Once you've started your research, meet with your high school college counselor to evaluate and narrow down your list of schools. Keep in mind that colleges will evaluate your profile in relation to your peers at your high school, so your counselor can likely provide some insight here. A candid discussion about your course load, grades, extracurricular activities, and admission goals will allow your counselor to honestly assess your college list and also allow them to suggest some additional schools that might be a good fit. Your counselor is a great resource and can help you identify some schools of interest that you may not have considered before.

Reach, Target, and Safety Colleges

To create a balanced list, students must first understand what makes a school a reach, target, or likely so that they can

categorize their list appropriately. Most schools have an area on their website that shows the admission profile of the most recent incoming class. These profiles include data such as the number of students who applied, were admitted, and enrolled class rank, and standardized test scores. Based on your own profile, categorize each school as a likely, target, or reach school.

- **“Likely” schools** = student’s academic profile is significantly stronger than the middle 50 percent of students who are typically admitted.
- **“Target” schools** = student’s academic profile is similar to that middle 50 percent.
- **“Reach” schools** = student’s academic profile is not as strong as the middle 50 percent.

We advise students to apply to 3-4 reach schools, 4-5 target schools, and 2-3 likely schools.

Keep an Open Mind

There’s no one-size-fits-all when it comes to choosing a college. It’s a personal decision that should be based on the factors that are most meaningful to each student. Before adding any school to your college list ask yourself, “Why this school can I call it home for 4 years?” Students should be able to answer this question about all of the schools on their college list. And you won’t be the only one asking that question – many colleges have a variation of the “Why this college?” question on their application. Once a student gets to know a college through

intensive research, visits, and other experiences, then they can decide if that school will be a good fit, regardless of reputation or where it falls on a publication's ranking.

Try this: Cover up the names of the schools and simply discuss academic course of study, professors, activities, student population, resources, surrounding community, etc., and try to envision yourself at that school. Could you see yourself enjoying classes and extracurricular activities there? Could you see yourself at that school for the next four years? When you focus on the experiences, a college might be cut even though its name was a very attractive one.

Many students get their hearts set on one school, and if they don't get in, it's the end of the world – that's exactly the wrong attitude to have! With more than 3,000 colleges in the US, it is important for students to do the research to find a balanced list of schools that they would be equally excited to attend. At LF Educational Consultant, we love working with students to find the schools where they will be happy and successful, especially schools that a student may not have heard of. **Contact us today** for more information. We can help you create a balanced list of best-fit colleges as part of your college prep.