

Advice from Tulane University

Junior Tips



For most high school juniors across the country and around the world, January signifies two things: the beginning of the second semester and the unofficial start of "The Process." Don't let that stress you out too much, though. Now's a good time to just reserve a little bit of mental space for getting acclimated with this crazy process of college admission. This spring, Tulane staff will be taking this blog on the road to cities across the country to share our candid tips for applying to college. We'll be having honest discussions about the application process in over 20 different cities.

I've posted in the past about ten tips for juniors and so today, your goal is to spend a little bit of time thinking about what matters most to you and how you envision your experience looking once you arrive at college. Does that sound a little too theoretical? Don't worry, I've got you covered. Here are five big-picture questions to start asking yourself.

Which schools am I already interested in? You probably have a few schools that are somewhere on your radar, even if it's way out on the edge. Maybe these are places your older friends attend, or a school your favorite teacher went to, or just somewhere you've kinda daydreamed about. Now is a good time to find out more about these schools. Start receiving information from these schools by finding their mailing list pages and signing up. Schools put a lot of time and thought into how they brand themselves and by joining some mailing lists, you can start to get a sense of what type of student best fits in at each school. I humbly suggest you join our mailing list [here](#). Once you're on it, it gives us the green light to share Tulane's story with you. Plus, it lets the Office of Admission know that we're potentially on your radar. It also takes around four seconds.

What size school is right for me? For some students, the idea of being at a giant school with 35,000 undergrads seems ideal. For others, a campus that is smaller than their own high school is a better fit. Getting a sense of how big of a campus you are looking for will allow you to develop a list of schools that are in that range. Looking for a school that will give you the best of the big and small? I think I know a great spot that falls right around 8,000 undergrads.

Where do I want to go to school? Big city? Small town? Rural? A few miles from home or a few hundred miles from home? A school's location is going to play a pretty big role in the four years you spend there. Some students picture that quintessential college town: Ann Arbor, Davis or Chapel Hill. Some want small-town liberal arts school vibes. And others crave that big city vibe: New York City, Boston, Miami, or New Orleans. Where do you see yourself continuing your formative years?

What type of school is the best fit for me? The way to parse this out is to do some research on liberal arts colleges versus research universities. Keep in mind, plenty of research goes down at liberal arts colleges and that the liberal arts are an imperative part of any major research university, so those names can kind of be a bit of a misnomer. That said, the vibe you'll get at a small liberal arts college is quite different from that of a large-scale research university. The main difference between the two is that liberal arts colleges tend to be smaller and more undergraduate-focused while universities tend to have the gamut of graduate and professional schools: law, medicine, etc. Kahn Academy has a great video detailing the differences between the two. Some other things to consider: are you thinking about one of the service academies or a music conservatory? Don't narrow it down too much at this point, but keep the type of school in your mind. Some students might be best served at a local community college for two years before transferring to a four-year institution. Some may know that a big state school is right where they belong.

How much can my family afford? Take this one lightly, for now. For starters, never rule out a school because of its sticker price. With schools like Tulane, you're often going to see total cost of attendance numbers starting with 7s. Don't let that scare you off. Take some time to explore each school's net price calculator to get a better sense of what your family might actually be paying. For example, if you come from a low-income family and are admitted to an Ivy League school, the vast majority of them are going to cover all of your financial need in order for you to enroll. This is also a good time to consider the benefits of public schools versus private schools versus community colleges.

And here are some things that I'd recommend you NOT consider at this point in the process. Put down the US News rankings and worry not about brand name reputation. There are roughly 2,600 universities and colleges around the USA. The best advice I can give you? None of them are bad schools, some of them just might be bad fits for you. Cast a wide net at this point in the process. Also, don't stress too much about majors at this point. The reality is that around 70% of college students change their major at least once. And, get this, every school in America is going to claim that they have "one of the best programs" for X major (as in... Tulane has one of the best Psychology programs in the country! One of the 2,000 best!) Now, if you are certain that aerospace engineering or music therapy is in your future, by all means research schools based on those hyper-specific majors. But for the other 99% of you, don't put a tremendous amount of emphasis on your academic programming quite yet.

Don't worry about what you think will look great on your college application. I mean it.

And there you have it—a few questions to ask yourself at this point in the process. There are a billion search engines that can help you answer these questions and narrow down your list. I like the Princeton Review but that is just one among many. Now might also be a good time to make an appointment with your school counselor who likely has a wealth of information about this process.

As you head into second semester and into the summer, I'll post a few more updates for how you can take this process one step at a time. You're going to be great!

by [Jeff Schiffman](#)