

ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF RISING SENIORS

This summer is critical for rising seniors. Students must make some of the most important decision of their lives. The situation is worst for the best students, since more colleges will welcome them. Most students do not know what their major will be. This isn't so bad as long as they have at least a general idea of the field they wish to pursue. A wrong decision here will be costly.

Starting out as an art major and switching to mechanical engineering after a year will certainly mean longer than four years in college.

Applying in a major that could be construed as pre-med to a university such as John Hopkins means that your student will be competing with the strongest students in the country for admission and may well be denied admission no matter how strong your student is.

Then there is the environment. Will it be a big city school with all the excitement and diversion of a big city? NYU is in Greenwich Village in Manhattan. The campus is concrete.

The streets are full of people all night long. But needless to say New York City has everything you could imagine from museums to coffeehouses and great public transportation.

Or maybe the rural setting of Virginia Tech would be more to your liking. A large park-like campus surrounded by a small town in the mountains. The sidewalks roll up after 9. Both are great schools, both are large (over 20,000), both offer every possible course of study a university could offer but they are as different as fire and ice.

The variety of colleges and universities is enormous. West Coast, East, mountains, oceans, cold, hot, small personal schools, large universities, Boston, Middleburg, Nuclear Engineering, Nursing, Architecture, Music.

Not all schools offer everything. Not all schools will allow you to take courses you may want. For example some of the large state schools won't allow you to take an art course unless you are an art major. The college experience is more than job training. It is the formation of who you are!

Be sure you can take those electives you have always wanted, even if it isn't part of your major course of study.

Then of course there is paying for it. \$50,000 a year is not an unusual number.

But don't be frightened off by high tuition. The best schools have the highest tuition but they are also the best endowed and will usually give bigger financial aid packages than schools with lower tuition. The whole thing is quite an undertaking.

A strong student should apply to at least 10 schools. He or she will be accepted to most of them. Then the student can take the one that best suits him or her. This summer is the time to pick schools!

Of course before you do this you should pick up one of the college books and do some research.

These books usually group the colleges by state and will give you some general information such as major offered, tuition, population, location, and just how hard it will be to get in. All schools have different philosophies about financial aid and obviously you would like to get the best deal. Be sure you complete all applications before Thanksgiving. And complete FAFSA in late January (no matter how much income you make!)

You really should visit the campus before you make any decision. You really gain a lot of insight once you set foot on a college campus and talk to some people.

Finally balance all the factors, size, reputation, environment and cost.

And don't worry about how far away the college is. A direct flight from California to Washington takes about 4 hours. No matter how you travel it will take longer than that to get to the University of Massachusetts (Amherst). A drive to NYC is 4 hours at least. I saw my son who attended San Diego State (a whole country away) more often than I saw his older brother who attended John Hopkins 30 miles away. And just get used to the fact that you will be broke for the next 6 years. Good luck!