

Sizing Up Colleges: Big vs. Small

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The Small College Experience

Do you enjoy personal attention from teachers and advisers? Then a small college may be just what you need. Some students find that a smaller setting is a better fit. Although there may be fewer facilities, there are also fewer students to compete with.

Here are some of the benefits associated with small colleges. Keep in mind, these may not be true of all of them:

- Small class sizes
- Hands-on learning opportunities
- Individually designed majors
- Strong advising system; advisers know students well
- Strong sense of community
- Professors, not teaching assistants, teach most courses
- Opportunity to get to know professors well

Things to Consider:

- Small colleges don't offer as many majors as big colleges; however, some of them let you design your own.
- Courses at small colleges are usually taught by professors, not teaching assistants. The professors may even know your name and areas of interest.
- Be aware that small colleges do not have the research facilities of large universities. If you're hoping to be a research assistant, find out what kind of work and facilities are available before you apply.
- Although you'll find a robust social life at most small colleges, you'll find less in terms of big sporting events and variety. However, there is often a stronger sense of community and connection.

The Big College Experience

Do you picture yourself at a Big Ten university that offers everything from televised sporting events to countless degree programs? Are you itching to break free of people knowing your name and enjoy the anonymity that comes with being one of thousands of students? Then a big college might be a good fit for you.

Here are some of the benefits associated with big colleges. Keep in mind, these may not be true of all of them:

- Wide variety of majors and courses
- Well-stocked libraries
- Variety of housing opportunities
- Well-funded sports programs
- Wide range of academic choices and student activities
- Distinguished or famous faculty
- State-of-the-art research facilities

Things to Consider:

- To succeed at a big college, it's best to go in knowing what subjects or general areas you're interested in pursuing. Students who do best at large colleges tend to be go-getters who are not afraid to speak up and take advantage of the many opportunities available.
- Introductory classes at a large college may contain hundreds of students. Some students find this environment exciting. Others feel overwhelmed.
- Another point: If you're attracted to a college because of its famous faculty, find out how many classes are actually taught by the professors, and not by their teaching assistants.
- Administrative red tape is also something to think about — large colleges tend to have a lot of it. For example, enrolling in a course that's not part of your major may require multiple signatures and approvals.