

How to Create an Affordable College List

Worried that college may be too expensive? You can keep costs down and still get a great education.

College doesn't have to break the bank. The trick is to understand the market. There are many ways to find affordable college options and to shave costs. Here is how to create a college list that is exciting — and affordable.

Get to Know College Pricing



Colleges post a sticker price on their website. But very few students pay this price. Most students aim to apply for grants and scholarships that bring this price down.

This is your net price. It's important to stay focused on this lower price as you look for colleges that may be in your budget. Find the net price calculator on your college website or college websites.

Know That You Have Good Options



College may be less competitive than you think. According to government data¹, nearly three-quarters of students attend public colleges and almost 90% attend schools that admit more than half of applicants.

What does this mean? Students and families have choices. There are many terrific colleges that will be a good fit for your budget.

How College Discounting Works



Different types of schools offer varying amounts of need-based and merit aid. It's best to apply to a variety of schools.

Your state's public colleges are likely to be the most affordable since they are taxpayer subsidized. Out-of-state public schools will vary depending on location and popularity. Many private colleges offer substantial aid to bring costs down.

Build a List of Affordable Schools



There are lots of ways to find affordable college options. Start by looking at your in-state public schools and community colleges. As a rule, these will be cheaper. You may also want to commute to a school near home and save money on housing.

Have excellent grades? Look for schools that promise to meet your full financial need. Tally up any college credits you earned in high school and find schools that accept them. Don't forget to look for opportunity programs and scholarships like the [Equitable Excellence Scholarship®](#).

Look for a College You Will Love



The cost of college is important, but so are other factors. Think about what you want to get out of college. An engaging career? Ways to serve your community? A fast track to your first job? Find schools that can deliver.

Then look at specifics. Hunt for schools that offer the academics you want and are a good fit for your skills and interests. Then work hard on those applications. Schools may offer more aid to students they believe will enroll.

1 Source: [Six Charts Showing Where Most Undergraduates in the United States Go to College](#), based on analysis of the 2023 Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Survey (IPEDS).

Learn How Much You Will Pay Today!



You can find out how much financial aid you are likely to get before you apply. Every college is required to have a net price calculator. Try it out! You will get a solid estimate of how much aid you will get at that college. Some colleges may be cheaper than you think. Check out the U.S. Department of Education's [Net Price Calculator Center](#).



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