

A quick look at...

WHICH COLLEGE?

Parents spend more time thinking about *how* to pay for college than what *kind* of college their children should attend. Yet the kind of college students attend affects not only what parents pay but—much more important—their children’s educational experience and chances for success.

The issue is not how smart a child is but where a child has the best opportunity to succeed. The relationship between students and their professors is the basis for that success. Therefore, I classify colleges by what they pay professors to do.

NOTE: This list focuses on general education institutions offering undergraduate degrees. It excludes technical schools, military institutions and strictly sectarian schools.

At **Community Colleges** professors are hired and promoted based solely on their teaching. These schools are an excellent start for students who feel they need extra preparation or who are unsure about attending college. Community colleges are inexpensive and offer a solid grounding in college basics. They have small classes and highly personalized instruction.

These schools offer unique advantages. For example, if a student discovers he has little interest in a general college education, he can transfer directly into one of the school’s vocational programs. This training offers a solid preparation toward a well-paying career. If on the other hand a student discovers an aptitude for college-level academics, she can transfer to a four-year college or a state university and thereby save several years of higher tuition cost.

At **Four-Year Colleges** professors are hired and promoted based primarily on their teaching, though they are also expected to do research. These mid-sized schools (10,000–15,000 students), have mostly regional reputations and typically grant only undergraduate degrees. Most classes are small and taught by full-time faculty who are expected to personally mentor students.

These are good schools for students who are ready for college but have not settled on an interest area or who need personal attention from professors. There are many schools in this category and consequently there is much variation in quality and character. Tuition reflects this variation. Some strong Ohio colleges include Dennison, Kenyon, and Otterbein.

A university is a collection of colleges (humanities, medicine, law, etc.) under one banner. At **Large State Universities** professors are hired and promoted based primarily on their research. These schools have a national reputation, student populations of 30,000 or more and boast a

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world-class faculty. Especially in the freshman and sophomore years however, your child will probably be taught by the professor's graduate students. Indeed, typically at these schools there is minimal interaction between full-time faculty and undergraduate students.

Unlike smaller schools, university professors are so overloaded with research demands and responsibilities toward their graduate students that professors do not have the time to seek out undergraduates to mentor. While this sounds grim, engaged undergraduates with initiative can find professors who are genuinely interested in working with them. Students, however, must be assertive enough to seek out professors.

In essence, Large State Universities are the Wal-Marts of education: they offer a tremendous selection of courses at rock-bottom prices but there is little personal service unless the consumer (student) actively seeks it out. These schools offer the greatest educational opportunity for each tuition dollar but students must be able to take advantage of it.

Many Large State Universities have branch campuses throughout the state. These campuses offer the advantages of small class size, personalized professional instruction and often a more relaxed admission policy. Later transfer to the main campus is typically a straightforward process and, in any case, students receive the university's diploma regardless of which campus they attend.

In Elite Institutions professors are paid and promoted based on outstanding teaching and research. These internationally known schools boast small classes taught by renowned scholars. This is the 'best of both worlds' and tuition reflects this fact. Admission is highly competitive but for many bright kids with strong high school records attendance is a life-altering experience. Attendance is a serious commitment though, both for the parent who pays the bills and for the student who strives to succeed in this high pressure environment.

For bright students who cannot afford or gain admission to an Elite Institution, the Honors Program at a Large State University is a cost effective alternative. These programs are essentially mini-Elite Institutions set inside a larger university. Professors actually compete to personally teach these students who often have their own classes, dorms and mentoring programs.

This is only a general overview. Within each college-type there are good and bad schools, better and worse bargains. This classification does not single out the "best" colleges; hopefully it helps you identify the type of college best for your child. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at **614-263-3900** or Rob@Reedplanning.com.

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