Bridge2College

Responsible • Reliable • Resourceful • Respectful

Guide to "Finding Your Dream College"



Bridge2college impacts students with leadership workshops, college tours, and scholarships for underrepresented exemplary students.
Johnny Baltierra, Founder Bridge2college

> Bridge2College builds the most important bridge of all —one that mentally and emotionally prepares our students to believe in themselves, be proud of their roots, and develop their innate talents while discovering new paths. Their achievements will open horizons for them, their families, and our communities."
>
> — Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, Ph.D. President of California State University, Fresno.

> Bridge 2 College empowers students with hands-on learning opportunities, including immersive field trips, interactive workshops, and compelling presentations. These experiences introduce students to college campuses, diverse career pathways, and real-world learning, broadening their perspectives and fueling academic ambition."
>
> — Dr. Salvador Navarrete Jr, Ph.D. Principal of Kerman Unified

> Golden 1 Credit Union is thrilled to celebrate the incredible dedication and hard work of the students! Bridge2College is paving the way for future success and California's future leaders. This program not only opens doors to new opportunities but also inspires hope and ambition in the hearts of these young individuals. Thank you for making a profound difference in the communities we serve. We look forward to partnering with you on the positive impact of your work and the bright futures of the students you support. Warmest congratulations and best wishes for continued success!"
>
> — Rosie Dauz Community Outreach Program Manager, Golden1 Credit Union



Introduction: How to use our guide

1



We are encouraging you to use our guide in using the four points into talking points.

2



Who is our guide for? We are giving parents, students, and counselors exercises which encourage conversations about the importance of the undergraduate experience and why?

3



Our guide provides a framework to discover your “dream school”-not based on rankings but on what will help you thrive!

4



* The goal is not to win at the college admissions race, but to find a place to grow, connect with peers, develop your talents, and prepare for a meaningful future

#1 Think of the other colleges,

not just the top 25!

1. 

   The College Admissions Process: 9th Grade

2. 

   Plan your schedule for the next four years with your counselor so you can take the rigorous courses which colleges require.

3. 

   Consider AP, IB, and Dual-Enrollment for college credit

4. 

   Journal to keep track your extra-curricular activities

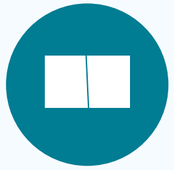
5. 

   Discuss interests with advisors, counselors to see what majors and careers interest you

Exercise: Widen your college lens



Step 1: Take out a piece of paper or open the notes app on your phone. (Then set a timer for 30 seconds)



Don’t consult any resources, write down the names of three college or universities you would consider attending if cost were not a factor

YOUR COLLEGE LIST

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

STEP 2: Check your list against the colleges below.

Mark off any of these highly ranked schools that also appear on your list:

- [ ] Amherst College
- [ ] Bowdoin College
- [ ] Brown University
- [ ] California Institute of Technology
- [ ] Carleton College
- [ ] Carnegie Mellon University
- [ ] Claremont McKenna College
- [ ] Columbia University
- [ ] Cornell University
- [ ] Dartmouth College
- [ ] Davidson College
- [ ] Duke University
- [ ] Emory University
- [ ] Georgetown University
- [ ] Harvard University
- [ ] Haverford College
- [ ] Johns Hopkins University
- [ ] Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- [ ] Middlebury College
- [ ] Northwestern University
- [ ] Princeton University
- [ ] Rice University
- [ ] Stanford University
- [ ] Swarthmore College
- [ ] University of California, Berkeley
- [ ] University of California, Los Angeles
- [ ] University of Chicago
- [ ] University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
- [ ] University of Notre Dame
- [ ] University of Pennsylvania
- [ ] University of Southern California
- [ ] Vanderbilt University
- [ ] Wellesley College
- [ ] Williams College
- [ ] Yale University

STEP 3: Discuss as a family or write in your journal

If you checked off 2 or 3 above, consider:

Why did you initially choose the schools on your list?

How does recognizing that they're highly ranked and selective influence how you feel about putting together your initial college list?

If you checked 1 or none above, consider:

What drew you to colleges deeper in the rankings?

How might you use those approaches that attracted you to these choices when compiling your college list?

#2 You need to know what you are looking for (or maybe not looking for) in a college.

STEP 1 **Learn from your high school experience.**

First, think about your high school experience and create a timeline:

Jot down the key moments when you felt most excited.

- List your favorite classes and what types of learning environments were the most engaging (i.e, lectures, group projects, hands-on labs, etc.).
- Add in your proudest achievements inside and outside the classroom. Include relationships (teachers, peers, mentors) that were most meaningful.
- What are some common themes across these different dimensions that show what you valued most in high school?

#2 You need know what you are looking for (or maybe not looking for) in a college.

STEP 2 **Clarify Your College Preferences.**

Next, consider what you want out of the college experience by rating these factors on a scale of 1 (definitely don't want or don't care) to 5 (definitely want). If you're unsure whether you want it or haven't really thought about the topic, mark it a 3

Academics

Large lecture-style classes (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely want)

Small seminar classes (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)

Prescribed core curriculum (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)

Choice in courses (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)

Broad liberal arts focus to curriculum (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)

Career/professional focus from Day 1 (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)

Research opportunities (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)

Step 2: continuation

Rate each factor on a scale from 1 (Don't Want/Don't Care) to 5 (Definitely Want).

Location

- **A campus that's within a 4-hour drive from home** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)
- **A campus that requires an airplane flight home** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)
- **Urban** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)
- **Suburban** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)
- **Rural** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)

Campus Life

- **Greek Life** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)
- **Big-time athletics** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)
- **Students who mostly live on campus all four years** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)
- **Arts scene** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)
- **Spiritual focus** (Don't Want/Don't Care) 1 2 3 4 5 (Definitely Want)

Circle the number that best reflects what you want from the college experience.

Step 2: continuation

Review Your Ratings

3

STEP 3: Look at the factors you rated 4 or 5 and rank them in order of importance.

- Look at what you rated a 3 and circle one or two for further research.

- Finally, look at what you rated a 1 or 2 and circle three that are the least important to you.

Step 4: See your ideal college experience.

4

Finally, think about the campus experience: What is your ideal day in college, both during the week and on a weekend?

Think about what classes you'd want to take, where you'd want to socialize, and how you'd want to spend your free time.

Review this exercise frequently during the search, examine after campus visits, and revise as necessary.

After you begin to figure out what you want (or don't want), you can begin to build your college list.

We recommend the three buckets: 1) Reach, 2) Target, and 3) Likely

We also recommend you select schools by "acceptance rates" :

1) under 40% acceptance rates, 2) 40%-60% acceptance rates, 3) 60%-80% acceptance rates and 4) 80% + acceptance rates.

#3 Find a Place where you will build relationships that last.

The College Admissions Process: 11th Grade

* Create an email for college related communications.

* Schedule standardized tests for the Spring semester(SAT/ACT).

* Plan college tours during Spring break.

* Connect and communicate with your teachers for recommendation letters.

* Brainstorm and draft your college essays.

#3 Continued

1. College experiences often come down to two elements: mentors who actively guide and support you, and a community that makes you feel welcomed and included. Research shows that students who build meaningful relationships with professors and peers early in college are more engaged academically, happier socially, and more successful after graduation.

2. Finding good mentoring and genuine community is not something that rankings measure. It requires asking the right questions, observing campus culture, and trusting your instincts.

3. College is what economists refer to as an “experienced good.” It’s difficult to know the true quality of the experience before you enroll—or in the case of college, sometimes until you’re a sophomore or junior.

4. Two attributes keep coming up over and over in the college research: 1) getting to know your professors (who might become your mentors) and 2) the ease of joining clubs and other extra-curricular activities (where you’ll find your sense of belonging also you can connect with mentors beyond faculty in the classroom).

Exercise: Mapping College Interactions

1. On their websites, social media, and visits to high schools and fairs, admissions representatives love to talk about their low student-faculty ratios, caring professors and advisors, and hundreds of clubs that can help you get connected on campus. When you visit colleges, you will hear the same speech about student engagement in small classes as guides walk you through shiny new academic buildings and show you undergraduates socializing on the quad.

2. Every college seems to claim these interactions. These connections to your peers and potential mentors are casual and sometimes superficial. In this exercise, map what admissions representatives tell you (the casual connections) and what you are able to find out on your own (the depth of meaningful connections).

3. While visiting colleges, look for faculty members hanging out after class or coming to the classroom early to chat with students, and see if professors show up for posted office hours (or ask that question on a tour, since some colleges limit access to academic buildings for nonstudents).

Notes:

Step 1: Collect evidence about the quality of in each of the four areas.

Exercise: Mapping College Interactions • Faculty connections

1 Casual Faculty Connections

- What is the student-to-faculty ratio?
- Do full-time professors teach intro courses or are they mostly taught by adjuncts?
- Are faculty members accessible before/after class and during office hours?

2 Meaningful Faculty Connections

- What percentage of undergrads complete research with faculty before graduating?
- How integrated are faculty members in residential life?
- Do faculty members actively help students create connections to internships, industry contacts, or graduate programs?

Step 1: Collect evidence about the quality of in each of the four areas.

Exercise: Mapping College Interactions • Peer connections

3 Casual Peer Connections

- How many student organizations exist?
- What percentage of students live on campus?
- What percentage of students stay on campus during a typical weekend?
- How are first-year students grouped in the dorms (by major, interest, randomly)?

4 Meaningful Peer Connections

- How easy is it to join the most popular clubs on campus, especially for first-year students?
- Do students primarily study alone or in groups?
- How often do students collaborate on projects?
- How much do older students mix with first year students?

Step 2: Evaluate and discuss. After completing this grid for several colleges, compare them:

1 Which area matters most to you personally?

- [ ] Casual Faculty Connections
- [ ] Meaningful Faculty Connections
- [ ] Casual Peer Connections
- [ ] Meaningful Peer Connections

2 Which colleges offer the most opportunities in that quadrant?

What specific questions could you ask on a campus tour to verify your findings?

What steps would you need to take as an undergraduate to move interactions from casual to meaningful?

#4 Ensure your college investment will pay off.

The College Admissions Process: 12th Grade

1. Create a system for tracking application deadlines, requirements, and scholarship details.
2. →Complete your college list and begin applications via Common App or institution-specific portals to finish before deadlines in the fall or winter.
3. → Submit financial aid forms, including CSS Profile (usually available October 1) and prepare documents for FAFSA (usually available by December 1).
4. →Follow-up regularly on college portals and emails about application status updates; send mid-year grades as requested.
5. →Attend accepted students' events to help make your final decisions about enrollment.

#4 Ensure your college investment will pay off.

College Investment & Career Preparation

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When you're choosing a college, it's important to understand the institution's overall financial health and its ability to invest in your success. A college experiencing financial strain may cut academic programs, reduce student services, or struggle to maintain facilities during your time there.

✓

Your own financial success will depend on acquiring in demand skills and practical experience before graduation. The skills students leave college with matter as much—even more, sometimes—than the major or institution at the top of the diploma.

Exercise:

Creating your skills and Experience Roadmap

01

STEP 1: On LinkedIn, Indeed, or other sites that post jobs (including individual companies), research careers you're interested in. List the top 3-5 skills employers consistently request for entry-level positions in your potential field.

List your five skills below

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Exercise:

Creating your skills and Experience Roadmap

02

STEP 2: For your top choices among colleges, investigate how you might develop these skills:

- Review descriptions of required courses in your major: Which specific courses teach these skills?

- Examine internship programs: Does the school require internships? How do they help students secure them?

- Look for microcredentials: What certificates or badges can students earn with their degrees?

Step 3: Calculate your potential return on Investment

1. For each college, estimate: • Use the net price calculator on a college's website or the U.S. government's College Scorecard collegescorecard.ed.gov to estimate your total cost of college multiplied by four years.

2. • Using the College Scorecard, look up median annual earnings for graduates in your intended major.

3. • Divide annual earnings by total cost to determine an "earnings-to net-price ratio." Rank the schools on your list from highest to lowest, and note the outliers on either end.

$$\text{Earnings-to net-price ratio} = \frac{\text{Median annual earnings}}{\text{Total Cost of Attendance}}$$

STEP 4: Reflection

Look at your college options and evaluate which institutions offer the best opportunities for hands-on learning and skill development.

1. Which schools provide the most real-world practice through internships, co-ops, or industry partnerships?

2. Where will you find the best balance of classroom theory and practical application?

3. Which college’s curriculum and extracurricular offerings will best allow you to develop and demonstrate the specific skills employers value in your field?

Our Last Word

In our B2C “Guide to Finding Your Dream College,” we have empowered you with the four key elements for finding the college that is right for you.

Our goal is for you to make a path through self-discovery which takes you to a college where we believe you will thrive academically, socially, professionally and spiritually.

There are more than 3,900 colleges and universities in the U.S. Your dream college is not about a single name or prestigious college like an Ivy League university, but It’s really about finding a place where you can thrive, learn, and become the person you are supposed to be.

If you found our guide to be helpful, please tell your friends so that they can get their copy by contacting us at Bridge2college.org

Thank you,

Johnny Baltierra, Founder & President

BRIDGE TO YOUR FUTURE

Bridge2College

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