

Question 1: What Is College?



Samir is in Grade 12 and thinking about going to college. He has some concerns that he shares with his guidance counselor.

Samir: *I am interested in majoring in English. How can I pick the best college for English? Some must be better than others.*

Samir's Counselor:

It is true that some colleges have a greater selection of courses or have a specific focus on a period or country. A worthwhile activity is familiarizing yourself with the courses offered in the discipline of your choice. Each college produces a full undergraduate catalog which lists all courses which are offered in a school year. Catalogs include, for instance, all the English literature offerings for first, second, third and fourth years. This will give you a sense of the variety and emphasis of that department. You can see these courses online or get a copy of the undergraduate catalog.

Samir:

I really want to go to college but I am afraid of making a mistake in the program that I choose. How easy is it to switch to another program?

Samir's Counselor:

There is usually a great deal of flexibility to switch Majors within an Area of Study. For instance, you should have no problem switching from English to Cultural Studies, or from Biology to Chemistry, or from Business Management to Economics. But, it is more difficult to switch into Engineering, for instance. Many colleges now offer an "undecided" or "undeclared" Major for first year. Then just make the best, most well-informed decision that you can now, and pursue your choice with vigor. You have to accept the fact that every decision you make involves risk to a certain extent but the risk can be minimized.

Samir:

Do I have any control over the roommate I will get? I want to room with my best friend. I hate surprises.

Samir's Counselor:

Many colleges will not allow you to choose to be with a particular roommate. This is not always the case, however. Generally, you are asked to submit a questionnaire stating your preferences for a particular building or a particular lifestyle. For example, you may be asked if you are an "early bird" or a "night hawk," an introvert or an extrovert (pages 71-72). Remember to be brutally honest when you answer these questions. Do not try to please or to impress. Your less than honest answers may come back on you at a later time. Usually the college will give you the name of your roommate and contact information during the summer. Making contact in advance is always a good idea. That is the way to avoid surprises.

When Samir speaks about "majoring in English" he is using college-related terminology.

In this handbook, on pages 91-94, there are explanations for many terms, like "Major."

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Samir:

My resource teacher and my previous guidance counselor have both told me to contact the colleges about my Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). I refuse to do this and my family agrees with me. I do not want to be pre-judged as less capable than anyone else. I want to be seen as equal. I don't want to create a bad first impression. My disability is no one's business but my own. Do you agree?

Samir's Counselor:

What you disclose is your business of course, but I definitely encourage you to put things in place for accommodation by giving the college a copy of your identification. It has nothing to do with your intelligence. If I refused to wear my glasses because people would think less of me for having to wear corrective lenses wouldn't you think I was being a bit paranoid or silly? If I have a prescriptive pair of glasses at my disposal I have the opportunity to wear them if I choose. If I want to sit and squint it's up to me. The same thing applies to your situation.

Samir:

With my learning disability, I am afraid to go to college because I don't know how I will cope. The special education and resource teachers have been so helpful here at my high school. I'm worried that I will sink when I go out on my own.

Samir's Counselor:

Good news. Not only are students entitled to the same help at college that they had in high school but the College Board now even makes special accommodations for you regarding writing your SATs. This is the result of legislation which was passed in the 1990s. Take advantage of it. Make sure to send documentation of your learning disability from your high school as soon as possible. Some of the accommodations at college might include being provided with a full set of lecture notes, receiving extended time to complete assignments and being given extra time to complete tests or exams. Also, some colleges provide camps or workshops in the summer to teach coping skills and to inform you of the services that are available. Take advantage of this opportunity.

Samir:

I am an international exchange student. Will I have to write an English test before I can be admitted to college? What score will I need? Can I do it online or do I have to do it with pen and paper?

Samir's Counselor:

If you have not spent four years studying all your subjects in English in an English language school, you will have to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or a similar test, regardless of the mark you have in your Grade 12 preparatory English. Each college's electronic undergraduate catalog and/or the hard copy of the undergraduate catalog will state the required score for entrance to that college.

... many colleges provide camps or workshops in the summer to teach coping skills and to inform you of the services that are available.

... most provide summer orientation sessions for students and their families.