

Question 1: What Is College?



Samir is in his senior year 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 43-44). 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.

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.

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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.

Samir:

How am I graded at college?

Samir's Counselor:

Few students going into college know the grading system. Understanding the grading system is

important for students who:

- like to set goals
- want to visualize their results
- work better with the gratification of a good mark.

It is your right to question any mark which you do not understand or which you think is unfair or wrong. In first year, often your work will be marked by a Teaching Assistant (TA). This person may or may not be experienced at marking or is perhaps over-worked and at times may make a mistake. It is your right to question a mark, especially if it is quite different from your other marks. Below is a typical grading scale and explanations of what levels must be maintained for a student to remain in college.

For the specifics of your college be sure to consult the undergraduate catalog and examine the college's grading system and the additional information which accompanies it.

The Princeton Conversion Chart at http://inquiry.princetonreview.com/leadgentemplate/GPA_popup.asp shows the GPA to grade conversions for a typical college. The following is a summary of that chart.

GPA	Percentile	Letter Grade
3.5 - 4.0	90 - 100	A
2.5 - 3.4	80 - 89	B
1.5 - 2.4	70 - 79	C
0.5 - 1.4	65 - 69	D
0.0 - 0.4	64	F

A grade of "D" is a pass for a course. Too many "D"s however, will definitely create academic risk. Academic standing is reviewed each year and decisions are made about whether you are allowed to continue at the college and continue in your program.

To continue at the college you are generally required to have a cumulative average of 2.0. Sometimes it will be decided that you may continue on academic probation if your average is very close but if it is lower than that you may be asked to withdraw.

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Colleges honor outstanding students. Each year, in many colleges, exceptional students with a minimum average of 3.4 on a required number of units are named to the Dean's Honor List and pass "cum laude." Students with 3.6 or higher pass "magna cum laude." Students with 3.8 or higher pass "summa cum laude."

If you go to college without a realistic view of what to expect, a lot of time (and possibly money) will be lost as you adjust to college realities. The following questionnaire lets you check to see if you have accurate ideas about college.

Circle True (T) or False (F) for the following questions.

1. College is a lot harder than high school. T or F
2. It is impossible to go to college if you or your family have not saved a lot of money. T or F
3. College is always a better choice, if you can do it, than a two year college or a trade. T or F
4. It is necessary to know what career you want before applying to college. T or F
5. You must know your Major in order to apply to college. T or F
6. There is no penalty for not attending classes since attendance is never taken. T or F
7. In college you are basically on your own. There is not a lot of help available because there are so many students. T or F
8. In first year all lectures have between 200 to 500 students. T or F
9. If you have the marks and the money you should definitely go to college. T or F
10. You must be careful choosing your college because some are known to be better than others and will guarantee that you get a better job when you graduate. T or F
11. College guarantees you that you will earn more money when you graduate. T or F
12. An American college is better than large, high quality colleges in other countries like England, Australia, India or Canada. T or F
13. It is easy to get lecture notes online. You don't have to go in person to the lecture. T or F
14. Since first year is a year of adjustment, your marks in first year don't matter. T or F
15. Arts and Humanities and Liberal Arts students don't get jobs. T or F
16. You need really high marks and high SAT scores to be accepted to college. T or F
17. All colleges offer basically the same programs. T or F
18. If you play sports and have been really involved at your high school your marks don't matter very much. T or F
19. Each college program automatically has a certain fixed cut-off average mark that is required. T or F
20. All colleges require SAT scores. T or F