



PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE

FIND ALIGNMENT • LOCATE A MENTOR

WORKSHOP

Presented by Eliot J. Grasso, Ph.D. (egrasso@gutenberg.edu)
Vice President & Tutor

Overview

Our culture presents us with mixed messages and convoluted thinking about college. When people think of the college application process, the most prominent issues tend to be the financial costs involved, the reputations of various institutions, and the perception that going to college “sets one up” for an easier life by promising employment as a result of a degree earned.

While all these factors contribute to thinking about pathways to college, I believe that a more helpful way to think about college foregrounds the purpose of higher education: the pursuit of truth and skills in an educational environment created by mentors who are in alignment with a student’s needs and values.

There are many different kinds of colleges, and each college can offer the opportunities to develop different skills. The purpose of this document is to equip families with the right kinds of questions to research before they invest in a college.

The most important question that a family needs to ask when considering college for a child is:

What kind of **educational environment** will facilitate the student’s goals and objectives?

An educational environment that offers highly transferrable skills such as critical thinking, clear communication, and complex problem-solving is desirable. On average, a person will hold 10 jobs by age 40, and that number is projected to grow. Therefore, a program that focuses on transferrable skills needed for a variety of all jobs can be a great option for long-term sustainability.¹ Since lecture-based education is largely passive for students, active discussion-based environments tend to do better in cultivating these critical skills.

¹ In a study conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 74 percent of business and nonprofit leaders say they would recommend a liberal education to college and university students for long-term professional success. 93 percent of employers surveyed say “a demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than [a candidate’s] undergraduate

The educational environment of any institution is created by the **faculty**. Since education centers on a dialogue between a teacher and a student, research the faculty at an institution before you invest.² Below, you will find information and suggestions for how to research the faculty at an institution.

Faculty

The **faculty** (teachers) create the educational environment in which your child will be developing while in college. Before you invest in an institution, you and your child need to understand (i) who the faculty are, (ii) why faculty do what they do, (iii) how faculty are selected, (iv) how faculty are incentivized, and (v) what faculty offer to students.

Incentivizing Faculty: Tenure

Most institutions of higher education offer **tenure** to their faculty. Tenure is a life-time position at the college where the faculty member teaches and serves as a major incentive because of the job security it provides. The incentive of tenure governs how faculty will choose to spend their time. When a new faculty member starts, s/he has to perform in three areas: (1) research, (2) teaching, and (3) service. **Research** consists of new publications that advance the faculty member's field. **Teaching** consists of work done in the classroom with students. **Service** consists in serving on various committees. Duties in research, teaching, and service are logged in the tenure file. After a number of years, the faculty member's tenure file is reviewed, and the administration either offers tenure to or withholds tenure from the faculty member.

Research vs. Teaching Institutions

There are two basic types of institutions: (1) **research institutions** and (2) **teaching institutions**.

Research institutions require faculty members to publish work that advances their field for tenure, while also asking them to teach. At research institutions, publications weigh heavily in the decision to offer a faculty member tenure or not.

Teaching institutions require faculty members to do significant amounts of teaching for tenure. The teaching requirement is more significant than the research requirement in teaching institutions. Teaching institutions incentivize their faculty to interact with students, and weigh student evaluations and observations more heavily than publications in the tenure file.

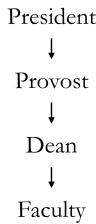
In research institutions, faculty may have less time and less incentive to interact with students outside the classroom due to heavy research requirements. Reputable faculty at name-brand institutions may or may not be assigned to undergraduate courses where your child will be studying. Instead, research institutions may hire teaching assistants for such classes to protect the research time of reputable faculty. Your institution of choice may have reputable faculty members, but that faculty member may or may not be available to interact with your child.

The Structure of Institutions

It is ultimately the Dean's responsibility to assign courses to faculty members. Thus, the Dean is directly responsible for building the faculty who will craft the educational environment at a college. The chain of hiring looks like this:

major." *It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success*. 2013. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities and Hart Research Associates. https://www.acu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2013_EmployerSurvey.pdf

² A college may have a great reputation for a variety of things (facilities, food, extra-curricular activities, sports, etc.), but this reputation may have nothing to do with what actually takes place between the teacher and the students.



Adjunct Faculty

A faculty member can be **TTF** (tenure-track faculty) or **NTTF** (non-tenure-track faculty). The most common type of NTTF faculty member is the **adjunct**. An adjunct is a faculty member who, rather than receiving a lifetime appoint through tenure, is hired as a contractor on a per year or per class basis. Adjuncts are not compensated as well as tenured faculty, and, consequently, may need to teach at a variety of institutions to make a living. An adjunct may or may not have time to interact with students outside of class and may or may not have a serious investment in the bigger philosophical/educational picture of the institution that your child attends.

Adjunct Faculty, Budgets, and Fragmentation in an Educational Environment

It is cheaper for institutions to hire adjuncts seasonally than it is for them to hire tenured faculty. Thus, institutions may employ a large number of adjuncts to teach in lieu of one tenured faculty member. The more adjuncts there are at an institution, the more fragmented an educational environment can become. Fragmentation is caused not by the quality of teaching, since adjuncts are no less skilled than tenured faculty, but by the level of adjunct faculty investment in the institution caused by less incentives. Faculty who are hired “for life” (tenured) are more likely to be invested in the long-term health of an institution and its educational environment than those who are hired on a seasonal basis.

Research the Faculty – Find a Mentor

Education is fundamentally relational. Your child will be well-served if s/he can build good relationships with teachers. In order to learn about whether or not a college is in alignment with a student’s needs and values, you should contact the Dean to learn about the faculty.

DO THIS #1: You should email/call the Dean with the questions below (note: larger universities may have multiple Deans—locate the Dean in the department/school of your child’s area of interest):

Hiring Protocol

Questions to ask the Dean about hiring protocol for faculty members:

- a. Does your institution offer its faculty tenure? Why or why not?
- b. Does tenure hinge more on research or teaching?
- c. What personal qualities do you look for in faculty before you hire them or give them tenure?
- d. Do you employ adjuncts?
- e. How are adjuncts selected?
- f. What percentage of classes are taught by adjuncts? Why?
- g. Do students have advisors? What makes a faculty member a good candidate to be an advisor? What role does an advisor play in the life of a student while the student is enrolled?



Faculty Profiling

Faculty profiles on college websites tend to be geared toward professional accomplishments and awards. You will need more than a list of accomplishments to determine whether or not a faculty member will be a good mentor to your child. Your research objective is to **locate a mentor** for your child. When a child leaves homes to attend college, they will have to survive. They will have to make decisions about what kinds of compromises they will make socially and financially to survive. The child will benefit from having someone at their college who can serve as a mentor, someone with whom they can dialogue about serious life issues who will listen well and give sound counsel when asked. The mentor *might* be a faculty member. But, your research might reveal that your child will need to go in a different direction.

DO THIS #2: Email a faculty member in your child's area of interest and see if they will answer questions about how they teach and why. Ask them:

Questions to ask faculty members:

- a. Why do you teach?
- b. What is your philosophy of teaching?
- c. What drew you to your subject area of interest?
- d. What do you want for your students?
- e. How do you believe that interacting with you (the teacher) achieves these ends?
- f. Are you available to meet with students outside of class time and outside of office hours? Why or why not?

DO THIS #3: Research the faculty in your child's department of interest on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

- a. What is this instructor's worldview like?
- b. What are this instructor's religious/political beliefs?
- c. How do they handle disagreement?
- d. What kinds of articles/images do they post?

If it looks like a faculty member might not be the best option for a mentor, research campus ministries, churches, community organizations—find someone who can connect with your college-bound child.

Does the Instructor's Worldview matter in the Educational Environment?

Audrey, a student at Gutenberg College who graduated from Classical Conversations said this:

"I've found that having college instructors who share my basic worldview is helpful in encouraging me towards truth during this great life transition. But further, I think it is important having instructors who acknowledge where a student is in their process (wherever that may be) and are comfortable with dialogue. I feel like it is a combination of these two things that truly helps grow a student."

Trisha, a homeschooled student at Gutenberg College said this:

"Worldviews change what a person values in an education, in writing, in discussion. If your basic worldview doesn't match with your professor, you end up with a massive gulf, and the people offering you the education often won't present you with the things you believe are valuable and want to pursue. Opposing ideas are important. They cause growth and can help create both confidence when you find out you are right, and humility when you learn you are wrong. A teacher should differ enough to challenge you and bring you different angles on ideas. But when a person disagrees with



you fundamentally, it makes it all the more difficult to communicate with them, and that is not a problem you want between you and an instructor.”

PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE WORKBOOK

I think the purpose of college education is: _____

I think this because: _____

College Choice: _____

I think this college will be beneficial for my child’s faith long-term because this college...

I think this college will be beneficial for my child’s relationships long-term because this college...

I think this college will be beneficial for my child’s vocation long-term because this college...

I trust the following person/ministry/organization to provide emotional/spiritual/intellectual support for my child while s/he is on-site at this college:

The director of the academic program of interest to my child is: _____

I can contact him/her in the following way: _____

This college’s (1) Admissions Application deadline is: _____

This college's (2) Financial Aid deadline is: _____

This college's (3) Residence Application (live on campus) deadline is: _____

The cost of annual tuition for this college is: _____

The cost of living on campus at this college costs: _____

Total: \$_____

I will anticipate needing \$_____ in grants/scholarships for my child.

I understand the relationship between the cost of college and its benefit to my child in the following way and here's why:

I will investigate the following **need-based** grants:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

I will investigate the following **merit-based** scholarships:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____