

# MAKING THE FINAL DECISION

Jill H. Apple, Co-Director of College Counseling, St. Paul Academy and Summit School

**TOO MANY CHOICES?** The ultimate goal of a good college search is to have several choices, meaning colleges that have accepted you. Whether you are admitted to two or too many colleges, eventually you must decide where to enroll. However, the criteria that you use to make your final decision may be significantly different from those you used when you made your application list. Some students feel almost as if they're starting their search all over again. No matter what your final choices, you now have more information available to you than you did in the fall of your senior year, so take the time to consider some important factors.

## ACCEPTED STUDENTS VISIT PROGRAMS

Many colleges have special programs for you during this decision making time. Open houses or overnight experiences are geared specifically for accepted students. Take advantage of these great opportunities to visit classes, see what the dorms are like after hours and to meet other students like you, who are making their final decisions and who may be your classmates next fall. No longer will you have to sit through general sessions about admissions and financial aid; you can now ask very specific questions and learn the answers first hand.

## CAN'T VISIT? CHECK OUT THE WEB SITE

If you can't afford the time or expense of spring visits to college campuses, take a trip via the Internet. Many colleges have comprehensive web sites that will give you an inside glimpse of life at that college. Want to know what's making news on campus? Look at the student newspaper on line. Curious about the reading assignments in an English Literature course? Scan the course descriptions and syllabi. Do you have other questions? E-mail the Admissions Office and they will link you to faculty or students who can respond appropriately. If you're not hooked up to the Internet, take time to dig deeper into each college's course description books or curriculum guides.

**WHAT'S THE REAL COST?** If finances are an important part of making your final decision, April is the time to sit down and review the real costs of each of your college options. Students who have applied for financial aid should have received paperwork regarding financial aid packages. Packages may vary in amount, as do the costs of tuition, room and board. Review this information carefully and pay attention to the differences in the amount of aid that you will eventually have to pay back (as with a loan.) Also, compare the hidden costs of transportation, books, fees and personal expenses.

**MAKE A CHECKLIST** If you haven't used the checklist system during your college search, now's the time to make one. Create a checklist with the top ten items that are most important to you in your future college. In addition to checking the boxes that apply, attach a standard rating (1 is low and 10 is high) for each category. Add up your totals and compare the scores.

## TALK TO YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

High school

guidance counselors can be very helpful to you as you consider your final decision. In addition to being knowledgeable about colleges, many counselors keep in touch with graduates who may be attending one of the colleges you are considering. Most importantly, a counselor is skilled at helping you find your way to making a decision.

## PAY ATTENTION TO THE REPLY DATE

Most colleges observe the May 1 common reply date, meaning you must reply by this date to reserve your place in the freshman class. In order to make sure your reply is received, mail it (usually with a deposit check) well in advance of the deadline. If for some reason you cannot meet this deadline, talk to your guidance counselor for help in requesting an extension. You may not send a deposit to more than one school at this time. Also, pay attention to any additional forms for housing or registration that must be completed and returned.

**ENJOY** After a year of applications and uncertainties, it's nice to finally know your choices. Enjoy examining all of the possibilities and look forward to the wonderful opportunities awaiting you at your future college or university.