

Ranking Your Most Important College Qualities

College selection involves trade-offs. While you may want many qualities in your ideal college, some factors will matter more to you than others. When you know your top priorities, it becomes much easier to evaluate colleges and make confident, informed decisions. Review the list of college characteristics below. These represent important variables that differentiate one college from another, but they may not rank ALL of the factors you feel are important. Think carefully about which factors are most important to YOUR college experience and future success. Rank the factors in order of importance by placing a number next to each one. Put “1” next to the factor that is most important to you, “2” next to the second most important factor, and so on. There are no right or wrong answers—only what matters most to you.

Example:

If religious life is your top priority, write “1” next to that factor. If cost is your second priority, write “2” next to it, and continue until you’ve ranked all factors. Be honest with yourself. Students sometimes think they “should” prioritize certain factors (like academic majors), when other factors (like distance from home) may actually be more important to their happiness and success. Optional: Place a check (✓) next to any factor that is a deal-breaker—something that is imperative in your college search.

- _____ A balanced academic/social experience
- _____ Accessible teachers
- _____ Availability of academic support services
- _____ Campus life, activities, and school spirit
- _____ Close to home
- _____ Cost/affordability
- _____ Geographic location (region, climate)
- _____ Hands-on/experiential learning
- _____ Prestige/name recognition of the college
- _____ Religious, ethnic, or cultural environment of the campus
- _____ Specific academic programs/majors I am interested in
- _____ Student diversity (ethnic, geographic, perspectives)