





FUTURE
COLLEGE PARENT

Toolkit



**THERE IS
NO ONE WAY
TO CONDUCT A
COLLEGE SEARCH.
No magic formula.
No quick fix.**

College searches are as varied as the students conducting them, but there are some timely tips, pieces of advice and words of wisdom to help guide your family through this process. And while we certainly hope your student will apply some of it to research on Dickinson, we understand that we're not going to be on every student's list. So we hope you find this toolkit useful in your student's search no matter where they end up applying and enrolling.

A photograph of four students sitting in red Adirondack chairs on a green lawn. In the background is a two-story stone building with white-framed windows and a white door. Large trees with green leaves are in the foreground and background. A red circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

Some students
manage the whole
process on their own.
Others are guided/nudged/
prompted regularly by
family members. And many
are somewhere in the
middle.

Relax!

Going to college is a big deal, and deciding which one to attend is a major decision but the most important step is to help your student consider his or her options carefully and conduct all of the research needed to make a well-informed choice.

You have time.

You have resources.

You have options.

You can breathe.



Making the List

THE BIG 3 QUESTIONS

Most students ask the same three questions when narrowing down their college list:

- **Does the college have my intended major?**
- **Can I get in?**
- **Can I afford it?**

Important information to have, sure, but don't let these be the only questions your student asks. Students' intended majors might change several times before they graduate (or even enroll), so it's important to remain open and not get too fixated on that published list of majors or academic programs.

And yes, getting in and being able to pay for college are certainly priorities, but in the early stages, don't let those class profile data points or the sticker price turn you off. **Dig deeper.**

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Big city or small town, close to home or a plane ride away, on the water or in the mountains.

Colleges are found in all sorts of environments, and the location is an important part of the ethos and vibe of the institution. Talk with your student about what they like or don't like about where you live, where you've vacationed, where you visit. Consider your student's educational interests (Civil War history or modern architecture?) and hobbies (skier or surfer?) and which campuses would best support them.

MAKE IT ABOUT YOUR STUDENT!

Your student's learning style and personality are important factors to consider as you begin researching colleges. Encourage your student to do some self-evaluation. The school needs to fit the student, not the other way around.

SEVEN WAYS TO LEARN



SOLITARY



AURAL



PHYSICAL



VERBAL



VISUAL



LOGICAL



SOCIAL



Lib•er•al arts, n., plural:

areas of study (such as history, science, mathematics, language and literature) that develop students' general knowledge and ability to think, in addition to their technical skills

TRANSLATION

a liberal-arts education equips students with a varied skill set that will enable them to excel in any number of careers. They will learn how to think, how to write, how to collaborate, how to communicate, how to thrive. **These are skills in demand by today's employers, as cited in *Forbes*, *U.S. News*, *FastCompany* and other publications.**

“Throughout the major U.S. tech hubs, whether Silicon Valley or Seattle, Boston or Austin, Tex., software companies are discovering that liberal arts thinking makes them stronger.”

—Forbes

“Educators point out that a liberal arts education can offer a host of marketable skills to students who may want to work in many types of organizations and rise into leadership roles.” —*US News*

“A close look at the career trajectories of liberal-arts graduates highlights five factors—beyond traditional classroom academics—that can spur long-term success for anyone from a non-elite background. Strong support from a faculty mentor is a powerful early propellant.” —*The Atlantic*



[More at dickinson.edu/liberalarts](https://dickinson.edu/liberalarts)

DID YOU KNOW?

Public colleges are those that are supported by state funds, while private colleges are supported by tuition, endowment and donations.

Mining for More

How to make the most of college visits

- Not all college visits are created equal. **CHECK OUT** the options available and determine what might make sense for an introductory visit, a second visit and maybe even a third. An “open house” at one school may be vastly different at another.
- **SEEK OUT** the offices/staff who will play an important role in your student’s college experience, whether that’s a coach, an administrator focused on a particular religion or the team committed to DEI on campus.
- For an initial visit, and if the campuses are close together, **SCHEDULE** two visits in one day or over a couple of days.
- **ENCOURAGE** your student to take notes and photos while on campus to help as you reflect on the school following the visit.
- **CONNECT** with a member of the admissions staff (at Dickinson, that would be your student’s regional counselor)—if not on the day of the visit, then afterward over email.
- **LEAVE TIME** for your student to get to know the campus on their own terms—peruse the library, hang out in one of the social spaces, enjoy a bite to eat in the cafeteria.
- **ATTEND** a sporting event, lecture or gallery talk.
- **VISIT VIRTUALLY:** Many colleges have added or enhanced their virtual-visit offerings, which makes exploring more distant options much more feasible!

Check out Dickinson’s virtual options at dickinson.edu/virtualvisit.

Do we *really* need to visit again?

DID YOU ENJOY YOUR FIRST VISIT TO

[enter institution name here]?

YES!

A second visit is a great way to further test for “fit” and experience campus in a different season or through a different style of visit (large open house, small day visit, self-guided).

ANOTHER GOOD EXPERIENCE?

NO.

YES!

Stay engaged with the school! Make sure you’re on the mailing list. Follow them on social media. Read the emails they send you and peruse the website. Then if you’re still feeling it,

APPLY!

NO.

If there are still compelling factors that make you want to continue to explore the school, try again! Try a different style of visit (large open house, small day visit, self-guided), make sure the weather or season is different if that was a factor or request a different tour guide.

BETTER?

YES!

NO.

Consider crossing that school off your list.



Virtual fairs are a great opportunity to connect with colleges from around the country and the world, from home! If your student is trying to explore options and learn about a wide range of colleges, this could be an ideal starting point.

WHAT'S ALL THIS TALK ABOUT "FIT"?

When choosing a college, your student's sense of "fit" is a key component. How does the school make your student feel? Does it feel welcoming? Does it feel like the right size? Is this a place where your student can grow and excel?

THE BEST WAY TO DETERMINE FIT IS TO VISIT THE CAMPUS, SPEND TIME with its people and **DISCOVER FIRSTHAND** what makes the institution distinctive.

STEALTHY SLEUTHING

Some students never get onto a school's radar until they hit "submit" on the application, but they have spent hours mining the website and social media and often have even spent time on campus, just not on an official admissions visit. It's a well-known character that admissions officers call a "stealth applicant," but be wary that it can be harmful if said admissions counselor is looking for "demonstrated interest" (more on that later) as part of the application process.

COLLEGE FAIR PROS AND CONS

A college fair (or two or three) can be a great opportunity—or a total bust. A few tips for your student to keep in mind when determining how to navigate a college fair:

- **CHART A PATH:** Pick a starting point and an end point that will allow you to see as many tables as possible.
- **BE OPEN:** Check out some schools that might not be on your radar.
- **TAKE ADVANTAGE:** The representatives of the schools are there to answer any questions you or your student might have, so ask away!
- **SORT IT LATER:** It's a lot to take in! Collect brochures and swag and go through a few pieces a day.
- **SIGN UP:** Fill out those info cards to get on mailing lists. That way the colleges you are interested in can reach out to you, by mail and email, with more information.

Use Your Resources

A FEW RESOURCES TO CONSIDER

- **REGIONAL COUNSELOR** – At every college or university, there are members of the admissions staff who can work with you and your student throughout the process. At Dickinson, your student has an assigned regional counselor who not only can offer advice and support but also serves as an advocate for your student when it comes to application time.
- **FINANCIAL AID COUNSELORS** – Financial aid personnel at colleges and universities are well-versed in the FAFSA, scholarships, loans and more. Connect with them early and often!
- **HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE/COUNSELING OFFICE** – Encourage your student to stop in! School counselors have resources and tools at their disposal, as well as connections with admissions counselors around the country. And they know where students from your child's high school have gone and been successful.
- **NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR** – OK, maybe not literally your next door neighbor, but you know someone whose child is now happily ensconced in collegiate life. They've been through this process, and they've survived, and they are usually more than happy to pass on tips and words of wisdom. **You probably even know someone with a Dickinson connection—our network is amazingly broad!**
- **OTHER PARENTS** – What opportunities are there to connect with parents of current students or recent graduates of the schools you're exploring? Reach out to the parent relations office or check the website.

Your family does not need to struggle through the college search process alone! There are so many people, programs and tools available to you.

COMMONAPP.ORG

More than 800+ colleges and universities are members of **The Common Application**, which means one general application that is submitted to the schools of your student's choosing.

Pay attention to the other application requirements that those schools might have. Many add additional essay prompts or recommendation requests.

COLLEGE GUIDES

Fiske, U.S. News, Peterson's, Princeton Review, plus web-based search tools like **Niche**, **Naviance** and even **Rate My Professor**—there are myriad means for students to gather information about colleges and universities. Don't let them become overwhelming, but encourage your student to utilize them to expand their search (if their search needs expanding!).

COST CALCULATORS

While a variety of financial resources exist, Dickinson offers two options to help families estimate their personal cost of a Dickinson education—MyinTuition and the Net Price Calculator. Using a simplified version of our normal application and awarding processes, both are designed to give potential applicants an early estimate of their eligibility for need-based financial aid.

Dickinson.edu/costcalculators



Time to Apply



In the same way that the college search process is very different for each family, the final decision on how many schools to apply to is also very different for each student.

Students average five to eight applications, but some report submitting only one or two, while others submit upward of 15 or 20. So whether you put all of your proverbial eggs in one basket or ensure they are spread out among reach (schools that your student might not be accepted to), probable and safety schools, here are a few nuances to the process that are worth considering.

SUBMITTING SCORES

A growing trend in college admissions is for schools to waive the requirement that students submit their SAT/ACT scores. For students who don't perform well on standardized tests and feel their scores aren't representative of their ability, this has great appeal.

Test-optional and test-free:

Test-optional colleges allow applicants to choose whether or not to submit SAT/ACT scores, placing a greater emphasis on high school academic record and other factors like writing samples, interviews, letters of recommendation and extracurriculars. Test-free colleges (like Dickinson) have removed standardized testing from admissions (and scholarship) decisions entirely. To view a list of colleges with these policies, visit fairtest.org.

**So, if a school is test optional,
how should my student decide
whether or not to submit scores?**

- **CONSIDER** his or her entire academic and extracurricular profile.
- **REVIEW** the policies listed on the websites of your student's top schools.
- **COMPARE** your student's scores to the range reported by his or her top schools, as well as national averages.
- **ENCOURAGE** your student to connect with his or her admissions counselor for advice.

A photograph of a college campus. In the foreground, a large tree trunk is on the left. A red banner with the word "Dickinson" in white serif font hangs from a pole. Another smaller red banner with "Dickinson" is visible further back. In the background, a white building with a stone base and a large window is partially obscured by trees. A group of students is walking on a path to the right. One student is pushing a bicycle with a red wheel.

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“Demonstrated Interest”

This important factor in many admissions decisions is often kept rather quiet. You won't find it on a school's application checklist, but it's something to keep in mind. It comes into play most often as schools are making final and very difficult decisions on who to admit, who to defer and who to deny. If Student A and Student B have nearly identical applications, but Student A visited campus (see first bullet at right) and responded to an email from the admissions office, but Student B did not, **who do you think is most likely to get admitted?**

How Students Should Demonstrate Their Interest*

- **Visit campus** (officially registering with the admissions office, not an undocumented pop-in). *Of course that's not always possible, so there are lots of other options, like:*
- **Communicate** with an admissions or financial aid counselor, an alumni volunteer or a current student. Share your interest with them and ask questions!
- **Connect** with the school's representative at a college fair or during an off-campus event, or have an interview with an alumni volunteer.
- **Get on the mailing list.**
- **Apply early** (see next section).
- **Encourage** your student to tailor the personal statement to the particular college—if it's a generic cut-and-paste submission, it will show.
- **Hashtag it!** Whether it's a hashtag for your student's potential incoming class or one being promoted during a visit program, add it on to a selfie or a tweet to let the school know you're paying attention! (This is also a great way to peek at what other students are experiencing/saying.)

***AUTHENTICITY IS KEY:** The above is not a checklist. If your student truly wants to be admitted to a certain school, these are valuable tools to help, but they are not guarantees.

Timing is (Almost) Everything

Recognizing that each student is different, works at a different pace and has a different level of interest in each school on their list, colleges offer multiple ways to apply for admission.

- **EARLY DECISION (ED)** allows students to declare an institution as their first choice. This is a binding program, which means if a student is admitted in ED, he or she will withdraw applications to any other institutions and enroll.
- **EARLY ACTION (EA) / PRIORITY** allows students to submit their applications earlier and learn their admission decision earlier.
- **REGULAR DECISION (RD)** is often the largest pool and the final round of decision-making for the admissions office.
- **ROLLING ADMISSION** is when colleges consider each application as soon as all required information (such as high school records and test scores) has been received, rather than setting an application deadline and reviewing applications in a batch.

Trending toward early

More and more students are applying early for a number of reasons. Early applications are a source of “demonstrated interest,” mentioned previously. They offer the opportunity to be “deferred” rather than simply “denied” if an applicant is not quite strong enough. It also takes the pressure off to have those applications submitted and decisions received earlier in your student’s senior year!



Plan Further Into the Future

While your family might be focused on the four years that will be spent at the colleges on your list, make sure you spend time looking at how those college prepare their students for the future.

- 1. RESEARCH OUTCOMES DATA**—what's the four-year graduation rate, the acceptance rates into law and medical schools, the percentage of alumni employed after graduation?
- 2. WHAT KINDS OF JOBS DO ALUMNI HAVE, AND WHAT GRAD SCHOOLS DO THEY ATTEND?** (Bonus: Can you see this information for the specific academic area your student is interested in?)
- 3. VISIT THE CAREER CENTER ON CAMPUS** and explore its website to find out what it offers in terms of internships and job-search support.

Dickinson Delivers

- Dickinson's Advising, Internships & Career Center ensures graduates are ready for whatever comes next.
- 96% of Dickinson grads are employed, interning, in grad school, or pursuing a fellowship within one year.
- Our grad school acceptance rates are strong: 95% for medical and 94% for law.
- Prominent alumni include the CEO of L.L.Bean, president of the New York Knicks, Forbes' most powerful woman in healthcare and the foremost authority in nanotechnology on the planet.

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OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS
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Visit **Dickinson.edu** for more detail on the topics covered in this booklet and information specific to Dickinson.

GOOD LUCK to you and your student during the college search process! We hope you find this information helpful. Please know that you can connect with the Dickinson staff anytime at **admissions@dickinson.edu** or **800-644-1773**.

