



# A DETAILED GUIDE TO THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF COLLEGES





## WHY COLLEGE?

That is the question you must ask yourself before diving into this resource. You need to know what exactly it is you're looking to get out of a college education before figuring out what kind of college you want to go to. The purpose of college differs for everyone, but the general reasoning tends to fall under the following major tenets:

- Social Mobility. Education has long been heralded as a ticket to greater socioeconomic opportunity. Though the path to and through college has definitely grown more complicated in recent decades, the narrative of the path to good fortune still rings true overall. The pursuit of higher education allows for the attainment of new knowledge and skills, both of which are crucial when seeking to build a career and, ultimately, increase one's earning potential. As most jobs in the United States now require at least some form of postsecondary credential, it is important to understand the value of exploring the numerous ways to increase your chances of employability. This is especially true for people from low-income backgrounds. Those who grow up without a sense of financial security are often told that earning a college degree will give them the chance to have a better life in adulthood. Of course, college may not be the right choice for everyone, but there is no denying that earning a degree can open doors--financially and professionally. If you're genuinely interested in continuing your education after high school and seeing how far it can take you beyond the circumstances you were born into, going to college just might be the right option.
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- Preparation for a Particular Career. While the coveted bachelor's degree is the ultimate goal for many college-goers, for some it is only the first stop on a much longer journey. For those with careers in mind that require some form of graduate education, the choice of whether to go college is a no-brainer. Careers in fields like law, medicine, academia, and (sometimes) business all require a degree higher than a bachelor's. If you know that you're interested in pursuing a profession that requires additional schooling beyond the undergraduate years, it is best to start exploring the kind of college at which you want to begin your academic journey, along with majors and other programs that can put you on the path to earning admission to the strongest graduate program of your choice.
  - Personal Growth & Exploration. All else aside, college provides a great opportunity to learn about yourself. We spend our entire childhood and adolescence in school, so, in spite of what may be expected of us, it makes little sense to think we can have the rest of our lives figured out by the time we turn eighteen. You may know you want to go to college after you finish high school, but that doesn't mean you need to know exactly what you want to study or the kind of career you want to pursue. That's what college is for! Many college students who are unsure of their path begin their college journey with an open mind. You can use those years to explore different fields and discover and expand your passions. You've spent over a decade in school learning; college is no different! What's new is getting the chance to construct a learning experience based on your interests, rather than meeting a set of arbitrary academic standards. The time has come to switch lenses and focus on yourself.

Check out the last page of this guide for examples of the different types of colleges listed!





# COMMUNITY COLLEGES

- 2-year; public
  - Degree earned: Associate's
  - Typically offers open enrollment, meaning that anyone can apply and that the admissions criteria are generally noncompetitive (unlike most 4-year institutions).
  - Because they are open to people of all ages, they typically have large student bodies.
  - Majors tend to be very specific. Examples: nursing or medical imaging. If you have a specific career or trade in mind, going to a CC may be a better choice than going to a 4-year school, where the curriculum tends to have a broader focus.
  - Good place to start if you finish high school with a low gpa and want a chance to get your grades up before transferring to a 4-year school. It's also good if you just want to cut overall college costs by doing your first two years in an Associate's program.
  - Many states (including RI) have opportunity programs that make community college free. Find more info on RI's program here: <https://www.ccri.edu/ripromise/>
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# LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

- 4-year; private
  - Degree earned: Bachelor's
  - Has a range of levels of selectivity (overall chance of getting in); it depends on what school you're applying to.
  - Typically small and offer a more intimate setting than most other schools.
  - VERY expensive - tuition at LACs typically costs 50k and 60k per year nowadays (this is NOT including room and board).
    - HOWEVER, LACs tend to offer great financial aid. If you are a strong applicant, there's a good chance you'll get a full ride to one of these schools. But even if you don't, you can still go to an LAC and graduate with little debt.
  - Offers a broad range of majors that you can use as a foundation to a variety of careers. For example, majoring in English can definitely put you on the path to becoming a teacher, but you could also go to law school (or even medical school!), become a writer, editor, or land any sort of job involving writing or communication.
  - Some LACs (keep in mind: the majority do not) offer master's programs. This gives you the chance to still get the LAC experience if you decide to go elsewhere for undergrad.
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# RESEARCH & STATE UNIVERSITIES

- 4-year; can be public or private
  - Degree earned: Bachelor's, but also provide numerous opportunities to earn a higher degree (master's, doctorate, etc.)
  - There is some overlap between these schools. Some state schools are also research universities, but not all research universities are state schools, particularly those that are private.
    - A research university is a university that has a strong commitment to conducting research. Original scholarship is at the core of its mission. Research universities are typically made up of various schools and colleges dedicated to specific areas of study. For example, Harvard has a wide variety of schools that all operate under the University, such as Harvard Medical School and Harvard Business School. Harvard and the 7 other Ivy League schools are good examples of private research universities. The University of California system is a set of well-known public research universities.
    - A state university (or state college) is an institution that is run with government oversight, or in other words, is public. This means that the school receives most of its funding from the state government and is a part of that state's public education system. Most states have a state university system, a set of public universities that serve as an affordable option for in-state residents (tuition at a state school is typically lower for those who live in-state compared to those who come from elsewhere).
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## FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES

- Timing depends on the program you're applying to; private
  - Degree earned: typically for-profit schools offer certificate programs, as opposed to full academic degrees.
  - For-profit colleges are higher education institutions that are owned and operated by private companies. This is the reason why they are “for-profit” - the people who run the school see it as an extension of their business; they run the school with the sole purpose of making a profit for themselves. A non-profit college, on the other hand, is required to invest whatever money it makes back into the school. It is not under the ownership of a money-making entity.
  - Known for mostly offering online programs. For this reason, they are a good alternative for older people looking to go back to school part-time to learn new skills.
  - Loose admissions criteria. They are not traditional colleges, so they can set admissions standards that allow people who may otherwise not have strong credentials to enroll in college credit-bearing programs.
  - Most have a specific focus, like healthcare-related fields of study, business, or technical skills. Like community college, this may be a better option for you if you're looking to get a specific job and aren't really interested in broader fields of study.
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- Be careful: Some for-profit colleges are not legitimate learning institutions. These are businesses, so their ultimate end goal is to make money, even if that happens at the expense of students. Some for-profit schools have been shut down for having a track record of not providing students with an education of sufficient quality and leaving them unable to find employment after completing their program. This is why it is absolutely crucial that you thoroughly research any for-profit school before deciding to enroll. If they are not an accredited institution (meaning they do not fit basic criteria for higher education standards) and they generally have a bad reputation among former students, chances are that school is not worth the time or the financial investment. Of course, there are for-profit schools that offer programs that are comparable to those at their non-profit counterparts. You just need to dig deep enough to make the best decision!
  - Learn more about for-profit colleges here:  
<https://thebestschools.org/resources/for-profit-colleges/>
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# EXAMPLES

## Community Colleges

Community College of Rhode Island  
(multiple campuses):  
Providence  
Newport  
Lincoln  
Warwick

## Liberal Arts Colleges

College of the Holy Cross (MA)  
Connecticut College (CT)  
Smith College (MA)  
Trinity College (CT)  
Wheaton College (MA)

## Research & State Universities

Boston College (Research)  
Boston University (Research)  
Northeastern University  
(Research)  
Rhode Island College (State)  
University of Rhode Island  
(Both)

## For-Profit Colleges

Draper University (CA)  
LIM College (NYC)  
Strayer University (VA)  
University of Phoenix  
(AZ)

