

Comparing Colleges and Degrees

Types of Colleges

Different types of colleges suit different types of people. Students should consider every type of college, and from there, decide which one best fits his/her needs.

- **Liberal Arts Colleges** — These offer a broad base of courses in the humanities, social sciences and sciences. Most are private and focus mainly on undergraduate students. Classes tend to be small and personal.
- **Universities** — Universities are bigger than colleges and offer more majors and research facilities. Class size often reflects the size of the institution and some classes may be taught by graduate students.
- **Community or Junior Colleges** — These offer a degree after the completion of two years of full-time study. They often offer technical programs.
- **Upper-Division Schools** — These schools offer the last two years of undergraduate study, usually in specialized programs leading to a bachelor's degree.
- **Agricultural, Technical and Specialized Colleges** — Specialized colleges emphasize preparation for specific careers such as art, cosmetology, music, Bible, business, health science and more.
- **Public vs. Private** — Public colleges are usually less expensive than private ones and get most of their money from the state or local government. Private colleges can be more expensive because they rely on tuition, fees, endowments and other sources of income. However, private colleges can be smaller than public schools and can offer more personalized attention.

Factors to Consider in Choosing a College

Parents and students should consider a wide variety of factors when identifying prospective colleges. High school counselors, family and friends can be good resources when narrowing down the field of higher education institutions. Some items to consider include:

- Curriculum/majors
- Quality of education
- Admission requirements
- Cost
- Accreditation
- Facilities
- Campus life/recreation
- Location
- Retention and graduation rates

Types of Degrees

If a student decides he/she would like to attend college, it's wise to decide what type of degree is of interest before beginning the application process. Five recognized types of degree programs exist:

- **Certificate of Completion** — these typically take anywhere from eight weeks to a year to complete. Careers including criminal justice, food service and financial planning, are examples of occupations that may require a certificate of completion.
- **Associate's Degree** — this type of degree requires about 60 credit hours of study. Some examples of careers that require an associate's degree are surgical technology and drafting technology. Many students who complete an associate's degree program often transfer into a bachelor's degree program.
- **Bachelor's Degree** — the bachelor's degree is the most popular of all the degree programs. Students pursuing a bachelor's degree must complete between 120 and 128 credit hours. Students pursuing professions such as public administration, computer systems development, educator, human resources and more take this study path.
- **Master's Degree** — in order to obtain a master's degree, students must have already obtained a bachelor's degree. Usually, students are required to write a thesis or be able to apply work experience to the degree program in order to obtain a degree.
- **Doctoral Degree** — it takes about five years for the average student to complete a doctoral degree. In order to obtain this degree, students must write a publishable thesis, complete their own original research and complete a course of study.