



**A SHORT  
GUIDE  
TO A  
HAPPY  
COLLEGE  
SEARCH**



Everybody loves **you.** →



**It must feel that way sometimes, right?** You're not even a senior in high school yet, and you've already got colleges beating down your door. So go ahead and pat yourself on the back. You must be doing something right.

Pretty soon, however, you're going to have to actually decide on one. You know the deal. Four years of intellectual rigor. Four years of personal inquiry. Four pivotal years that will forever shape your destiny. Oh wait, we're thinking of a presidential election.

The point is, you know well enough by now that the college search is a serious undertaking. But that's no reason to let it drive you insane. And to help you make sure it doesn't, the fine folks at **Goucher College\*** have compiled this guide to asking the right questions, getting good answers, and finding a college that's right for you.

\* Who couldn't possibly have an ulterior motive in doing so, could they?



PART I:

# **SIX MYTHS** about finding a college

six myths

what not to do

10 things to find out

how to stay happy

how to test your hunches

when you get anxious



Myth  
No. 1

**This is the biggest decision  
of your life.**

You're going to face plenty of important decisions in life—about things like marriage, kids, houses, cars, pets, lawn decorations... And then there's that whole career thing. You may run for political office. You may become a captain of industry. You may remove someone's brain. So don't let the "Big Decision" hype intimidate you. You can handle it. If you couldn't, you wouldn't have so many great colleges practically begging you to apply.





Make sure the colleges you consider are flexible enough to let you explore all your interests and change your mind if necessary.

Myth  
No. | 2

**There's only one college that's right for you; find it, and you're set for life.**

There are thousands of colleges and universities in the United States alone. Soon there will be hundreds of college brochures in your mailbox alone. Chances are you'd be happy at any number of these schools, even if one or another looks particularly compelling to you right now. And at every one of them, you'll find good people. Smart people. Funny people. Attractive people. People who want to help you make the most of your college education. So go ahead and get excited about the places that immediately catch your eye. Just be sure to keep your eyes open for the other pleasant surprises you may find along the way.

Myth  
No. | 3

**You have to know what your major will be NOW.**

You know that Jon Stewart guy from *The Daily Show*? He started out majoring in chemistry, switched to psych, and ended up making fun of politicians on Comedy Central. Denzel Washington studied journalism in college. And Britney Spears—well, she didn't go to college, but that's not the point. You don't want to be Britney Spears. The point is that if you're not sure, you're in good company. But definitely make sure the colleges you consider are flexible enough to let you explore all your interests and change your mind if necessary. (We're not even going to try to be subtle about plugging ourselves here: Liberal arts colleges like Goucher are particularly good at this.)

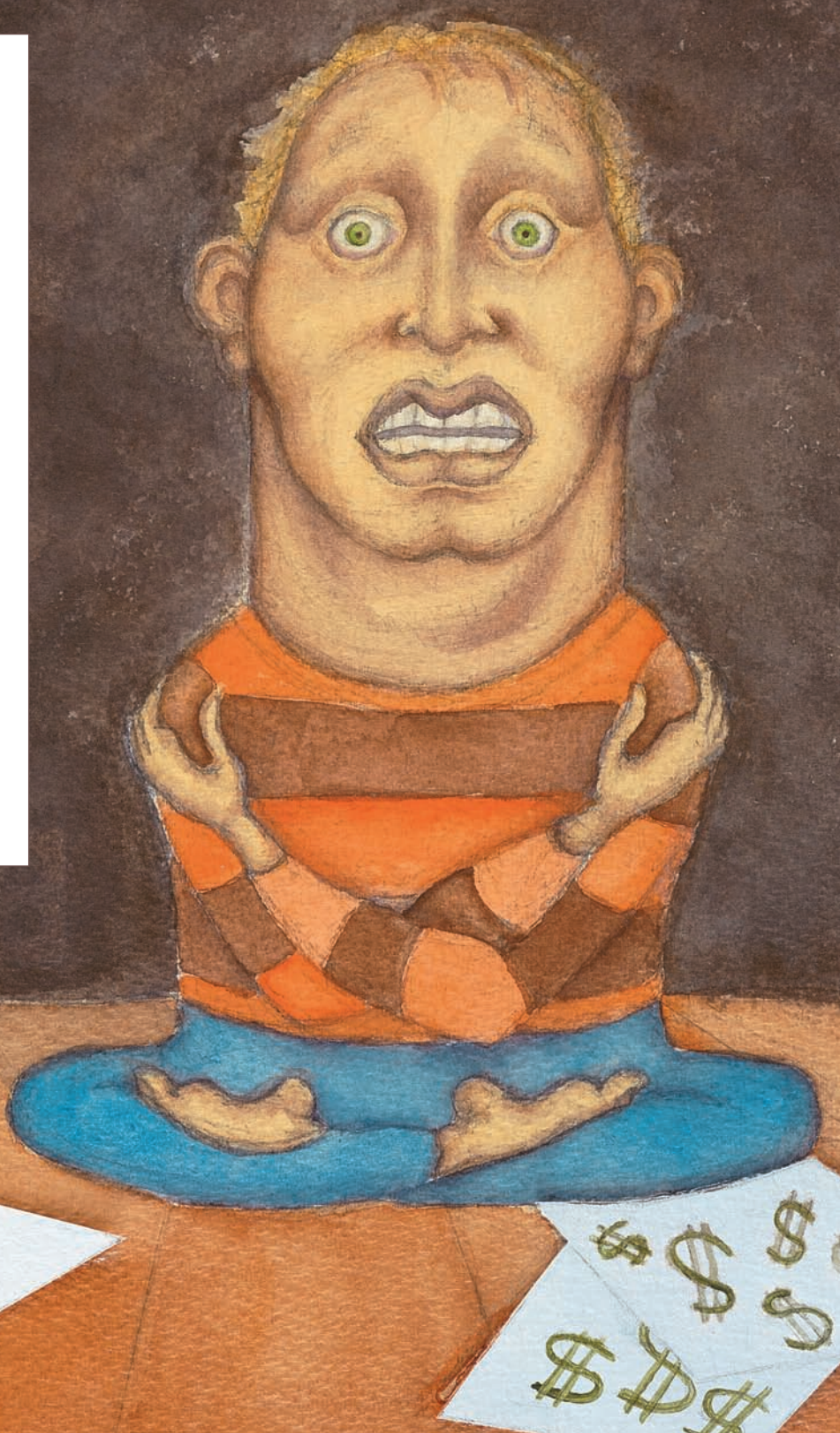




Myth  
No. | 4

**You can't afford it.**

It's called sticker shock. You (or heaven forbid, your parents) see the cost of tuition at some schools and start sweating profusely, gasping for air, and babbling nursery rhymes. Let it pass. Most colleges provide substantial aid to students based on their financial need or their abilities—or both. The government and many other institutions and foundations offer additional aid to qualified students. What's important is not “sticker price,” but how much you and your family are asked to pay after you've applied for financial aid. There are many ways to make college affordable.





Take the time to find the college that's really right for you. You'll be better off than if you decide too early on a college that's all wrong.

Myth  
No. | 5

**You have to go to a “brand-name” college to be successful.**

There are some advantages to brand-name institutions. They have really nice sweat-shirts, for example, and when you wear them, you will A) impress people and B) not have to explain how to pronounce the college's name, or where it is, or anything else like that. But the fact is that most successful people went somewhere other than brand-name schools. There are plenty of first-rate colleges that don't have ivy climbing the walls. And if you get to a popular school and find you're not really happy with the people, programs, or environment, *you* may end up climbing the walls.

Myth  
No. | 6

**You need to apply early to get into a good college.**

Some students apply early because they're absolutely certain of where they want to go and they know they can finance it. If you're one of them, great. But if not, don't worry. Most students need a little more time. Some have second thoughts during their high school senior year. Some need time to work out finances. All of this is fine. You don't have to make an early choice. In fact, you're better off taking the time to find a school that's really right for you than deciding too early and locking yourself into a decision that's not going to make you happy.





PART II:

# What **NOT** to do during your college search →

■ six myths

■ what not to do

■ 10 things to find out

■ how to stay happy

■ how to test your hunches

■ when you get anxious



### **Freak out.**

Procrastinate—too much.

Become obsessed with one college (see Myth No.2).

Mistake your SAT or ACT scores for your future.

Lose so much sleep that everybody starts calling you Zombie and you have a nasty accident with the Bunsen burner and some magnesium powder in sixth period—man, that was beat.

Forget you're still in high school.





PART III:

# Ten things to find out

about every college  
you're considering

1

**What kind of academic program do you offer?**

What degrees? How many majors? Is it okay to be undecided about my major through my first year?

2

**What is your student-to-faculty ratio?**

What percentage of your classes has 20 or fewer students? What percentage of undergraduate courses is taught by faculty? By graduate flunkies? By random people you just found on the street?

3

**How flexible is the curriculum?**

Will I be able to take courses in areas outside my major? Can I experiment? Do you encourage interdisciplinary study?



# 4

## **What study-abroad opportunities do you offer?**

Do you offer a range of choices—in terms of length of stay and places to go? Would studying abroad interrupt my major or co-curricular activities? Would it give me a distinguished and worldly air that would greatly enhance my love life?

# 5

## **What is the size of the college?**

Is there a strong sense of community on campus? Do students get to know each other and faculty easily?

# 6

## **Where is the college located?**

Is it rural? In a city? Near a city? Near my home (or far enough away)? What kinds of cultural, social, and educational opportunities and resources will I find nearby? Can I walk to the Starbucks? The CD store? The mall?





How do the students  
at your college  
spend their time  
outside class?  
Are they fun to  
hang out with?  
Are they happy?

7

**What kind of campus does your school have?**

Is it attractive and comfortable? What kinds of facilities do you offer? How many students live on campus? Is it a residential or commuter campus? If I get an evil, conniving, double-crossing roommate, can I vote him or her off the island?

8

**What student life programs do you offer?**

Are there many clubs and activities—or do you just say, “Hey, student, get a life”? How do students spend their time outside class? Are they happy? Are they fun to hang out with? Are they, you know, hot?

9

**What about athletics?**

Are you a member of the NCAA's Division I, II, or III? Do you offer intramural sports or other athletic opportunities beside your varsity teams? What kind of athletic facilities do you have? I'm totally into Frisbee Golf—do you have a course?

10

**What career development services do you offer?**

Will I be able to take advantage of them as a freshman? What can they do to help me later on when I start looking into grad schools and career opportunities? And what about internships? Is there a program in place? Do students have a good number of choices? Do their internships require them to know more than which pot is decaf?





## PART IV:

# How to stay happy during the college search

### 1

#### **Beware of other people's lists.**

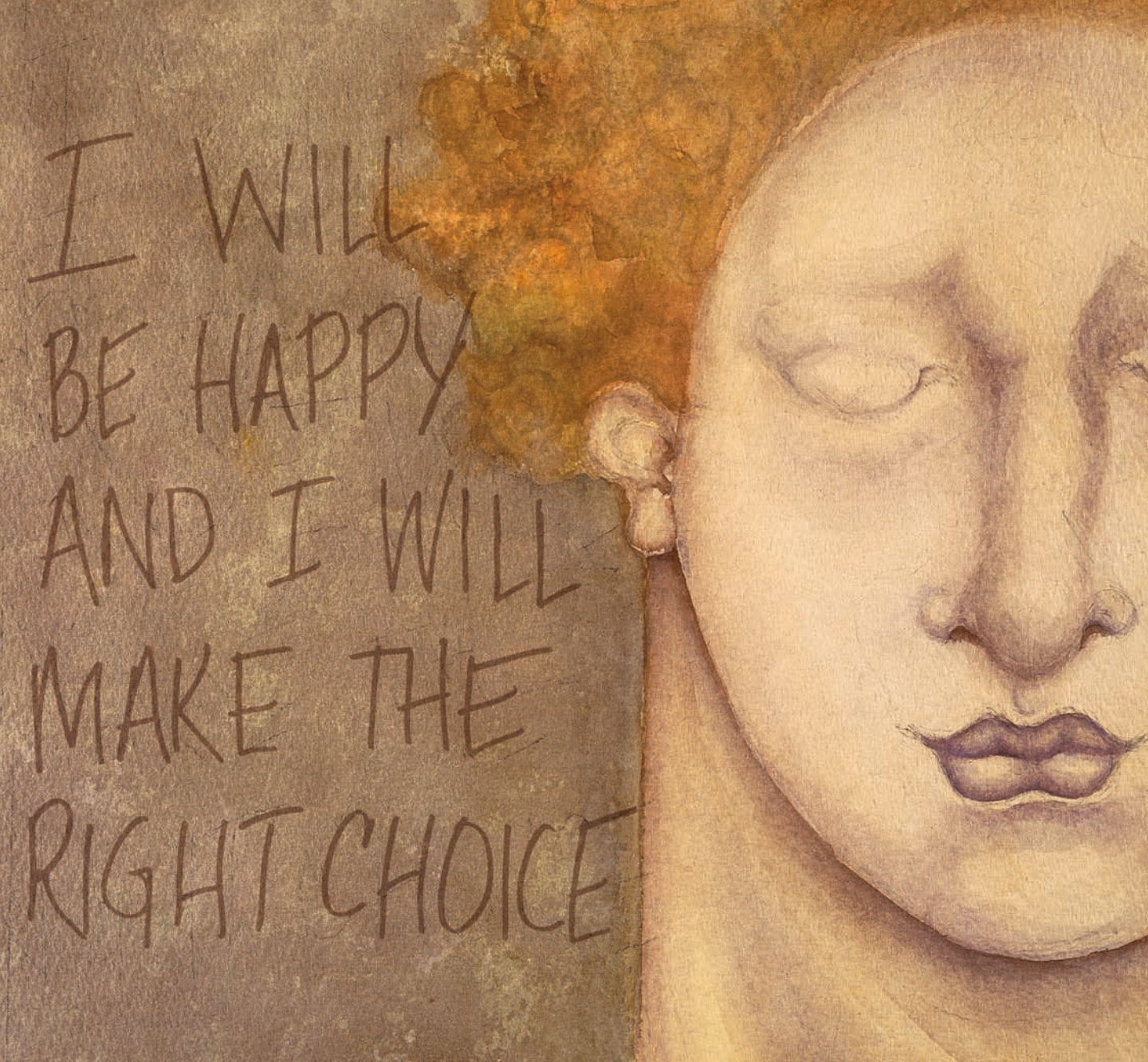
Remember, whether it's from *U.S. News & World Report* or your Aunt Linda's hairdresser, a list can't tell you everything. Every college has its own unique strengths—and its own unique character. Just like you. So ask the questions that matter most to you. And make your own list.

### 2

#### **Remember that this is not the search for the Holy Grail.**

There are lots of great colleges out there—so many that there's sure to be more than one that offers the kind of programs, opportunities, and overall experience you're looking for. Don't make yourself crazy by thinking you must find the One Perfect College For You. Chances are pretty good that your search will lead you to at least a few where you would be equally happy.





### 3

**In times of anxiety**, close your eyes, take three deep breaths, and remember: Millions of people have gone through this process, and almost none of them are now living out of the back of a van down by the river.

### 4

**In other times of anxiety**, repeat to yourself 20 times: "I will be happy and I will make the right choice." Twenty times. To yourself, lest the people around you think you've lost it completely.





PART V:

# How to test **your hunches**

# 1

## **Visit the schools you've selected.**

This is hands-down the best way to figure out whether you belong at a college.

# 2

## **Talk to people once you're there.**

College is a time to explore, so make sure that in addition to plenty of people who are like you, there are plenty on campus who aren't.

# 3

## **Sit in on a class.**

Many colleges offer you this opportunity, and you'll learn about much more than whatever they're talking about that day—like how big the classes are, how students and faculty interact, and how accessible the professors are.

# 4

**Stay the night** (especially if you plan to live on campus). Get a sense of how you'll be living for the next four years. How are the residence halls? What do students do after classes?

# 5

**Ask yourself:** Do I like this place? Remember: Sometimes rain will dampen your spirit, so don't let the weather convince you to cross a college off your list if you happen to catch it on a rainy day (unless it rains all the time on that particular campus; then, take note of how that makes you feel).\*

# 6

## **Trust your instincts.**

If you've done well in high school, you've probably made a lot of good decisions over the last several years. You should feel confident about your ability to make another one.

\* It doesn't rain all the time at Goucher. We're just saying.





→ AND FINALLY:  
**What to do if you get **anxious**\***

six myths

what not to do

10 things to find out

how to stay happy

how to test your hunches

when you get anxious



**Step outside.**

**Open arms wide.**

**Stretch all fingers.**

**Tilt head back,  
look at sky.**

**Scream.**

**Go back inside.**

**Start over.**

\*Works in any weather.

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**Goucher College**,  
who think that if you enjoyed this  
brochure, you might be happy here.

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