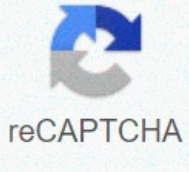




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College finders can be a useful tool in your college search. College finders allow you to search for colleges based on specific criteria like size, selectivity, and cost. You select what you're looking for in a college and then the college finder will spit out its results. In this article, I will explain what makes a college finder good and detail the pros and cons of some of the better college finders on the internet. The best college finders possess these qualities: Offer Ample Search Criteria The bad search finders will only allow you to search colleges based on a few items. Most of the subpar finders will limit their search criteria to only very general categories like location (US region), size, and type of college (2-year or 4-year and public or private). If you can only search for the location and the size of your ideal college on a certain finder, that may not help you narrow down your college search effectively. You may get hundreds of results that match what you're looking for in those categories. You'll more easily be able to find colleges that are a good fit for you if you can search for colleges based on many factors like cost, selectivity, majors offered, diversity, and extracurricular activities. At a minimum, a college finder should allow you to search for location, size, college type (2-year or 4-year and public or private), selectivity (admission rate and average GPA and SAT score), majors offered, extracurricular activities available, cost, and average financial aid awarded or percentage of financial need met. Allow You To Pick Multiple Options in Specific Categories A good college finder will allow you to select multiple options in the same search category. For example, better college finders will allow you to search for schools that are both large and medium size, as opposed to only being able to select one option. Give You the Ability to Choose How Important an Option Is to You Good college finders will allow you to prioritize how important specific search criteria are to you and will factor that into their search results. Maybe you'd prefer to go to a selective college, but that's not extremely important. On good college finders, you'll be able to indicate that that's only somewhat important to you. Provide Important Facts and Statistics About the Colleges It Finds On good college finders, when you click on one of the colleges in your results, you're given information about the school like its average SAT/ACT score and GPA, application deadline and requirements, student size, cost, and average financial aid award. How to Use a College Finder Effectively Think about your priorities for what you want in a college before you begin using a college finder. If it's very important to you to go to a school with a stellar reputation, then "selectivity" will be an essential factor you should search for. For most college finders, selectivity is determined by the admissions rate and the average SAT and ACT score of the college. Schools with low admissions rates and high SAT and ACT scores tend to have a higher caliber of student and the best reputations. Search for colleges using the most important factors to you to help narrow your search. I think the most important factors you should search for when using a college finder are location (rural or urban and geographic region/state), selectivity, and majors offered. Some finders allow you to select a more general area of study or select multiple majors. If you just look for big colleges and get hundreds of results, that probably won't be very helpful. To really narrow down your search results to a reasonable number, you'll probably also have to select search criteria like extracurriculars, cost, percent of financial need met, and diversity. I think a good number to aim for in your results is 15-40 colleges. If you get more than 40 colleges in your results, add more factors or increase the level of importance of certain factors. If you get fewer than 15, you can remove some search options or decrease the level of importance of certain options. If you feel like you need everything you searched for, then those could be the schools you should apply to. Make sure you're applying to at least a couple of safety schools. Generally, when you go through the search results, you'll be able to eliminate at least a few of the options because they won't have a quality that you must have in a college. Finders will give you a list that matches most of the criteria you're looking for, but not every school in your results will match everything you searched for. I did a hypothetical search on the college finder College Board's Big Future based on qualities I'd want in a college if I ever got a chance to do my undergraduate experience again. I guess I like to think about things that are impossible. I got 33 results, but I was able to immediately eliminate more than half of them because they were in a state or city I wouldn't want to live in (I searched by region) or they were either religious or tech schools. I wouldn't want my second undergraduate institution to have a specific focus. Once you get your results, after you do any immediate eliminations, click on each individual result to get more information about the college. After reading about the school and its statistics, if it still interests you, save it (this is also an option in certain finders) or write down the name of the school. After you've gone through all the results in your search, you should be left with a list of potentially good college options for you. Then, it's your job to research those schools more extensively. Look at their websites, read college guidebooks like Fiske or Princeton Review's Top 380 Colleges, and consult teachers, counselors, and alumni. Additionally, you can gather information about specific colleges and learn about their reputations from college ranking lists. Reviews of College Finders All of these finders are completely free to use. They do require registration, which is also free, to use features like saving your searches or search results. Big Future Big Future is the College Board's college finder. How Does It Work? Step #1: Select filters on the left to narrow down your college search. Enter the most important qualities to you in your dream college first. As you're entering search factors, the number of results is updated and displayed. Under each category, there are related subcategories. For example, under "Test Scores & Selectivity," you can enter your SAT/ACT score and the level of selectivity (by acceptance rate) you'd like your college to have. Step #2: Add more search filters until you're left with about 15-40 schools, and you've selected everything that's important to you. Step #3: Click on the colleges in your search results that interest you to see full profiles where you can get useful information like average standardized test scores, graduation rates, application requirements and deadlines, and the most popular majors. Profile for Abilene Christian University Step #4: From all this information, determine if each college still interests you. If it does, write down the name of the school, or you can click "Pin It!" If you register at the site, you can save your search and pinned schools when you're done. You can pin up to 25 colleges for any search. Step #5: Click "Compare pinned schools" for a side-by-side comparison of the major stats for all your pinned schools. However, you can only view the info for 5 colleges on the screen without having to click the right arrow at the top of the screen. Step #6: After reviewing the info from the schools in your results and comparing them, make your list of schools that you're interested in for further research. If possible, try to give the colleges preliminary ranks or put them in tiers from "most interested" to "kinda interested." The ideal number of schools to research at this point is about 6-20 before you finalize your list of schools to apply to. If your priorities change during the college research process, you can use the finder again to update your list. Step #7: You can use the College View finder to help you with the college selection process after you learn of admissions decisions. Pros There are 24 search categories; you're able to select numerous filters to help find colleges that possess the qualities you want. College View does have more categories that can impact quality of life like "liberal-conservative," "party scene," "greek life" and "great college towns." Also, unique to this finder, you can search for schools with a strong LGBT support system. For the colleges in your search results, you're given a ton of information. I was especially intrigued by links to virtual tours and important application advice from each college's website. In College View, you can search for colleges that have "high," "typical," or "low" representation of African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, or Caucasians. Cons Some of the results didn't seem to match what I was looking for. I did a search and selected that it was "very important" to find a "very selective" school (admitting less than 1/2 of applicants) and it was "very important" to me to find a school that matched my made up SAT score of 2130. Based on the other options I selected, one of the search results was Northern New Mexico College, which doesn't even require SAT or ACT scores for admission and isn't considered a selective school. The user experience is not as good as Big Future's. The design and font make search options hard to locate. The information looks cluttered and it's not as easy to identify all the listed information. While it does have "special services" and disability services" categories, you can't search for colleges with services for minority students and services for low-income students. In my college counseling experience, I know programs like EOP can be very beneficial for low-income and first-generation college students. Finally, for cost, you can only search for the cost of tuition and required fees. In Big Future, you can search for the percentage of financial need a school meets and for colleges that have work-study programs, financial aid for international students, and college application fee waivers. Keep in mind that the listed cost of attendance is not what you'll have to pay if you demonstrate financial need. College Data College Data is a good finder option for those of you who are especially interested in financial information. How Does It Work? Step #1: Select search filters to narrow down your college search. Enter the most important qualities to you in your dream college. Select as many factors as possible to limit the size of your search results. Step #2: Once you're done selecting all of the factors that matter to you, you can view your results. The colleges in your results will be listed along with their statistics. Step #3: Click on the colleges that interest you to read about them and get helpful information like freshman retention rates, application requirements, organizations, and class size. Step #4: After reviewing the info from the schools in your results and comparing them, make your list of schools that you're interested in for further research. Step #5: Do additional searches later on if your priorities change or to assist you during the college selection process. Pros There is much more extensive financial information in College Data than in Big Future or College View. You're given many more statistics regarding financial aid for the colleges in your search results. For example, here is the financial aid information for Boston University. Also, there's a "financial friendliness" search category. You can search for the percentage of financial need met, amount of student debt, and percentage of students that receive merit aid. Additionally, you can search for colleges by their level of representation of students from particular backgrounds, including Native American, African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and international. For each group, you can select "No preference" or greater than or equal to 2%, 5%, 10%, 20%, 40%, 50%, or 75%. Lastly, you can select up to 3 majors or disciplines from a very extensive list to help limit your search results and find the college you're looking for. Cons There are far fewer search categories than in Big Future and College View. College Data only has 9 major search categories. You can't look for schools based on your SAT score or religious affiliation. Also, you have to register before you can use a number of the best features to investigate the colleges in your search results. Some of these features include estimating your chances of gaining admission, calculating your net price (cost after financial aid), and saving colleges from your search results. I was reluctant to register because College Data is sponsored by 1st Financial Bank and a student credit card is advertised on the home page. I thought if I registered, I might get a bunch of spam. Big Future is run by College Board, a non-profit, so you don't have to worry as much about Big Future trying to sell you stuff. Like College View, the user experience isn't great on College Data. The design and display of information makes information hard to locate. Also, the font size and style make everything a little difficult to read. Finally, for most of the search categories, you can only select one option, and you can't select how important search options are to you. Examples of Bad College Finders Big Future, College View, and College Data are three of the better college finders on the internet, mainly because they offer tons of information and unique features to help you find the best college for you. Here are a couple of bad college finders. They're less beneficial to use. Niche Niche only has 9 search categories and no subcategories. There are no search categories that you can't find on other search finders. Nothing is uniquely good about this finder and it doesn't have many of the options of the better finders. Peterson's Peterson's only has 8 search categories. All can be found in other college finders, and you can't choose how important a search option is to you. While the user experience is good, this finder is far too general. There is so much more information on the better finders. Final Tips Overall, I think Big Future is the best finder. It offers the best combination of features, information, and user experience. However, College View is good to use if you want to do a search focusing on campus life or quality of life criteria. College Data is good to use if you want to do a search on or get extensive information about cost and financial aid. College finders should only be one tool, albeit a valuable one, in your college search. You should use college search websites, guidebooks, ranking lists, and guidance from teachers, parents, and counselors to help you select a college. Remember that these finders aren't perfect and can't determine for you which school is the best fit. They can give you insight and information to guide you, but after deciding what's important to you, doing your research, and visiting colleges (if you have the chance), it's up to you, and possibly your parents, to decide. What's Next? Make sure you read this excellent article on how to choose a college. Also, learn more about the differences between public and private colleges. Finally, look at this post to help you decide if you should go to a big or small college. Want to improve your SAT score by 160 points or your ACT score by 4 points? We've written a guide for each test about the top 5 strategies you must be using to have a shot at improving your score. Download it for free now: college knowledge word search pro answers

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