

# finding a college that's right for you

**Grade level:** high school juniors and seniors, in small groups

**Format:** discussion and workshop

**Teacher prep:** In Peterson's *Game Plan for Getting into College*, read about the "12 Ways to Choose the Wrong College." Write each one down on a slip of paper for the activity.

**Class time:** 1½ hours

## Materials

- flipchart and easel, or black/white board
- markers
- bowl and 12 slips of paper, each one describing a wrong way to choose a college
- books

*Looking Beyond the Ivy League: Finding the College That's Right for You* (Loren Pope)

*Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools That Will Change the Way You Think About Colleges* (Loren Pope)

*Harvard Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College that is Best for You* (Jay Mathews)

*Rugg's Recommendations on the Colleges, 26th ed.* (Frederick E. Rugg)

*Fiske Guide to Colleges 2010, 26th ed.* (Edward Fiske)

*College Handbook 2010* (The College Board)

*The Get It Together for College: A Planner to Help You Get Organized and Get In* (The College Board)

- laptop set-up to show VSAC Web site and access to VT Guidance Central
- refreshments (optional)
- handouts
  - College selection process
  - College comparison chart
  - College admissions timeline
  - Choosing a college major
  - College fairs
  - Visiting a college
  - Sample questions for the admissions interview
  - Sample questions for the financial aid office
  - College admissions checklist
  - College financial aid checklist
  - Recommendation request form
  - SAT vs. ACT
  - Score comparison: SAT vs. ACT
  - Surf the Web!

## Procedure

1. Welcome all of the participants and ask them what they'd like to cover in the workshop. Write the suggested topics on the board. Save this list for the end of the workshop.
2. Ask participants to pick a slip of paper from the bowl and read aloud the wrong way to choose a college that's written on the slip. Have the group discuss why these are wrong ways to go about choosing a college.
3. Provide students with suggestions on the right way to investigate college options.
  - Talk about college rankings, VT Guidance Central, helpful Web sites listed on the "Surf the Web" handout, college handbooks, college visits, and NSSE ratings.
  - Suggest the books listed under "Materials" and have them on display for students to peruse. Talk about the different ways that each of the books may be helpful.
4. Present an overview of the college search and admissions process.
  - Discuss the ways colleges vary in terms of selectivity, affordability, environment, campus facilities, etc.
  - Review the admissions timeline handout.
  - Discuss college visits and interviews.
    - why a visit is worthwhile
    - what students should look for
    - what questions students should ask
  - Talk about college fairs.
    - where local college fairs will be held this year
    - what students should do at a college fair
5. Ask students to talk about what's important to them and what a college needs to have in order to be a good "fit." To help students determine the answers:
  - ask them how they decide what's important.
  - have students use the "college selection process" handout to list important factors such as ranking, cost, size, location, selectivity, major, sports, extra-curricular activities, Greek life, volunteer options, job placement statistics, internships, and housing
  - identify the ways that students can find out if a school meets their requirements. Point back to items discussed under ways to investigate colleges, which could provide a lead-in to VT Guidance Central.
6. Introduce students to VSAC's online planning tool, VT Guidance Central.
  - Help them create a portfolio (optional).
  - Show them how to use the School Finder function to identify colleges that match their criteria.
  - Print out a list of colleges for students to take with them.
7. Check the board to see if all of the listed topics have been covered. If not, make arrangements to talk with the student(s) who mentioned the topic(s) not covered in this session. Touch on affordability and paying for college. Provide the VSAC scholarships booklet and VSAC's guide to paying for college.



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