

*A quick look at....*

## WHICH COLLEGE?

Parents usually spend more time thinking about how to pay for college than what *kind* of college their children should attend. The kind of college affects not only what parents pay but—more importantly—the educational experience their children have.

One way to classify colleges is by what they pay their professors to do. The following classification focuses on general education institutions offering undergraduate degrees. It excludes technical and vocational schools, military institutions, and rigidly sectarian schools.

At **Community Colleges** professors are hired and promoted based solely on their teaching ability. These schools are an excellent beginning for students unsure about whether they want a higher education or who feel they need extra preparation. Community colleges are inexpensive and offer a solid grounding in college basics. They have small classes and highly personalized instruction.

One creative option is to attend a community college for two years and then transfer to a four-year college or a large state university. Another advantage to a community college is if students discover they do not have an interest in a general college education, they can transfer directly into the school's vocational or professional training programs.

At **Four-Year Colleges** professors are hired and promoted based primarily on their teaching, though they are also expected to do some research. These schools have up to 12,000 students, primarily a regional reputation, and typically grant undergraduate degrees only. Most classes are small and taught by the full-time faculty who are expected to personally mentor students.

These are excellent schools for students who are ready for college but have not settled on their interests or who need personal attention from teachers. There is a great many schools in this category, but there is also much variation in quality and college costs reflect this fact. Some strong Ohio colleges include Dennison, Kenyon, and Otterbein.

A university is a collection of colleges (humanities, medicine, law, etc.) under one banner. At **Large State Universities** professors are hired and promoted based on their research. These schools have national reputations, student populations between 30,000 and 50,000, and boast world-class faculty. Your child, however, will probably be taught by the professor's graduate students, especially for the first two years. Indeed, often there is minimal interaction between faculty and students.

Unlike smaller schools, university professors are typically so overloaded with research demands and graduate student responsibilities that they do not seek out undergraduates to mentor. While this sounds grim, engaged students with initiative can meet professors who are often genuinely interested in working with them. But undergraduates must be assertive enough to seek out professors. In essence, Large State Universities are the Wal-Marts of education: they offer a tremendous selection of courses at a bargain price, but there is little personal service. Nonetheless, these schools offer the greatest educational opportunities for your money.

In **Elite Institutions** professors are paid and promoted to both teach and do research. These internationally known schools have small classes taught by renowned scholars. This is the “best of both worlds” and school costs reflect this fact. These are the most difficult schools to get into, but for many bright kids with strong high school records, attendance is a life altering experience. But attendance is also a serious commitment; both for the parent who pays the bills and for the student who intends to succeed there.

For bright students who cannot afford or gain admission to an Elite Institution, the Honors Program at a Large State University is a cost effective alternative. These programs are essentially mini-Elite Institutions set inside a large university. Professors actually compete to personally teach these students who often have special dorms and mentoring programs.

This, of course, is only a general overview. Within each college-type there are good and bad schools, better and worse bargains. This classification does not single out the “best” colleges; it helps identify the type of college best for your child. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 248-344-9616 or [Kelly@HarborLightPlanning.com](mailto:Kelly@HarborLightPlanning.com).

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