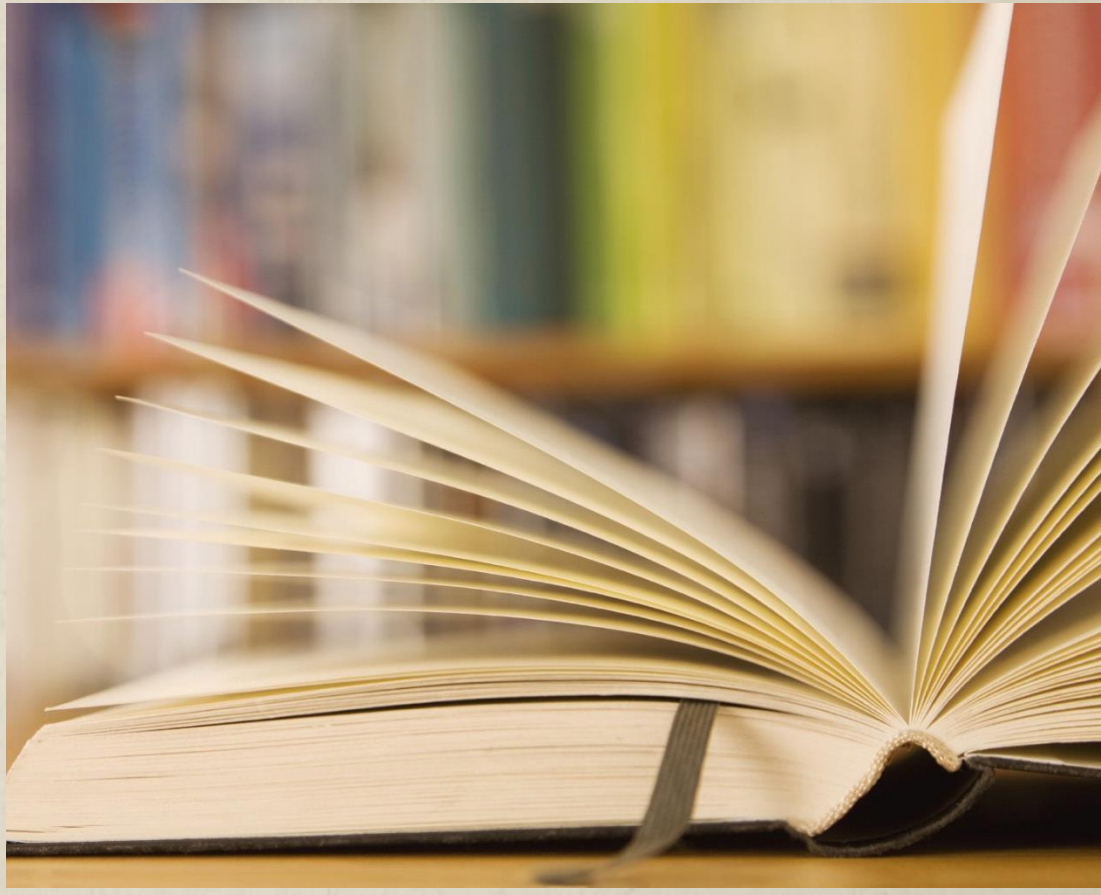
Finding the Right College ‘Fit’



PGHS COUNSELING
NOVEMBER 2026


WHERE DO I....
START
?

Identify the End Goal

- For many students/parents, the end goal is for their student to ‘get into’ a selective college after high school graduation
  - This is an understandable goal due to the intense cultural pressure that ties college or university prestige to future success
- The focus is on how the student can/will gain acceptance to a specific school or set of schools
- This mindset places the priority on the school and not the individual needs of the student



Selecting Potential Colleges is a Personal Journey

- Identifying a good college fit is a very personal experience
- It takes time, reflection, individual exploration, and research
- Parents, Counselors, and Teachers can provide guidance and support, but the student is the primary driver in the college search and application process



What is 'College Fit'?

During their college search, students are encouraged not to limit their college search to schools with quickly recognizable names and perceived reputations. The **ideal goal** is for students to create a list of schools that will meet their unique needs as individual students.

Academic	Social	Financial	Preferences	Atmosphere
Major(s)	Student Activities	Cost of Attending	Location	Visit - Appts or self-guided
Class Size	Diversity	Affordability	Size	Virtual Tour
Academic Resources	Weekend Activities	Available Aid	Religious Affiliation	YouTube 'Day in the Life @'
			Athletic Designation	

Common College Search Methodologies

- Direct marketing from colleges
- Recommendations from family and friends
- ‘Brand’ recognition from sport events
- College Visits
- Reviewing Acceptance Rates
- US News Best Colleges Rankings



US News Best Colleges Rankings

VALUE ADDED

- Provides 4 broad categories of universities and colleges:
  - National Universities
  - National Liberal Arts Colleges
  - Regional Universities
  - Regional Colleges
- Straightforward, well-known search engine
- Can be used as a rough guide to assess schools

SHORTCOMINGS

- Methodology does not measure the educational experience for each individual student
- Cannot compare school ranks between the four categories
- Statistically skewed to favor smaller, private schools with lower acceptance rates and smaller class sizes
- Ranking does not take cost into consideration

Evaluating Acceptance Rates

- Admission rates are simply the **number of students admitted** divided by the **number of students that applied**.
- THEREFORE: A popular school with a recognizable name (and healthy marketing budget) may receive thousands of applications for a limited number of freshman spaces.
- While it is true that selective schools receive increased numbers of applicants because of their *reputation*, acceptance rates are not necessarily an assessment of the quality of education provided but of the school's *popularity*.

Evaluating Acceptance Rates

- **FOR EXAMPLE:**
  - UCLA had **146,692** students apply in 2026 but only offered **15,903 students admissions.** The resulting acceptance rate for UCLA for 2026 was 10.8%.
  - Claremont McKenna College had **6,939** students apply in 2025 but only offered **655 students admissions**. The resulting acceptance rate for 2025 was 9.4%.

Selectivity

The selectivity of a school is based on their Admissions Rates, which can be impacted by a number of factors that do not directly correlate with academic excellence.

- **Selective colleges** admit less than 50% of applicants
  - CSU Long Beach, San Diego State, UC Davis, University of Washington, University of Oregon
- **Highly-selective colleges** admit less than 35% of applicants
  - Cal Poly SLO, Pepperdine, UC Irvine, UC Santa Barbara, UC San Diego, University of Florida
- **Super-Selective** admit less than 20% of applicants
  - UC Berkeley, University of Southern California (USC), Middlebury College, Wellesley College
- **Ultra-selective colleges** admit less than 10% of applicants
  - UCLA, Brown, Duke, CalTech, MIT, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, University of Chicago, Yale

Demystifying 'Yield'

- Yield is calculated by dividing the **number of students who enroll** (accept their admissions offer) divided by the **number of students offered admissions.**
- FOR EXAMPLE:
  - UCLA offered admissions to **15,903** first-time students in 2026. Of the **15,903** students who were accepted, 6,553 enrolled in the Fall of 2026. Therefore, the 2026 **Yield for UCLA was 41.2%.**
  - Claremont McKenna College offered admissions to **655** first-time students in 2026. Of the **655** students who were accepted, 335 enrolled in the Fall of 2026. Therefore, the 2026 **Yield for Claremont McKenna was 51.1%.**
- Interesting article on Yield: Universities, Colleges Where Students Are Eager to Enroll (Live Link! ☆)

Creating a Balanced College List

A balanced college list includes an equal amount of colleges and universities in your "Reach/Dream," "Target," and "Likely" categories that you are **excited** about applying to and can see yourself attending.

Reach/Dream

- Notably, these schools are *not* "out of your academic range" but rather at the very top of it.
- All Ultra-selective schools should be classified as a Reach/Dream School due to their admissions rates.

Target

- Are schools that match your GPA and standardized test scores (if required or used). While chances of being accepted is reasonable there's still the possibility of being waitlisted or denied, especially the more competitive a school is.

Likely

- The school should check off all of your boxes (size, location, degree offering) but consistently accept students with GPAs and test scores at or slightly below yours.
- You want the college to fall within, not below, the academic range in which you are sufficiently challenged and get out of the college what you need.

Your List of Colleges: What Are Likely, Target, and Reach Schools? (Live Link! ☆)

CaliforniaColleges.edu



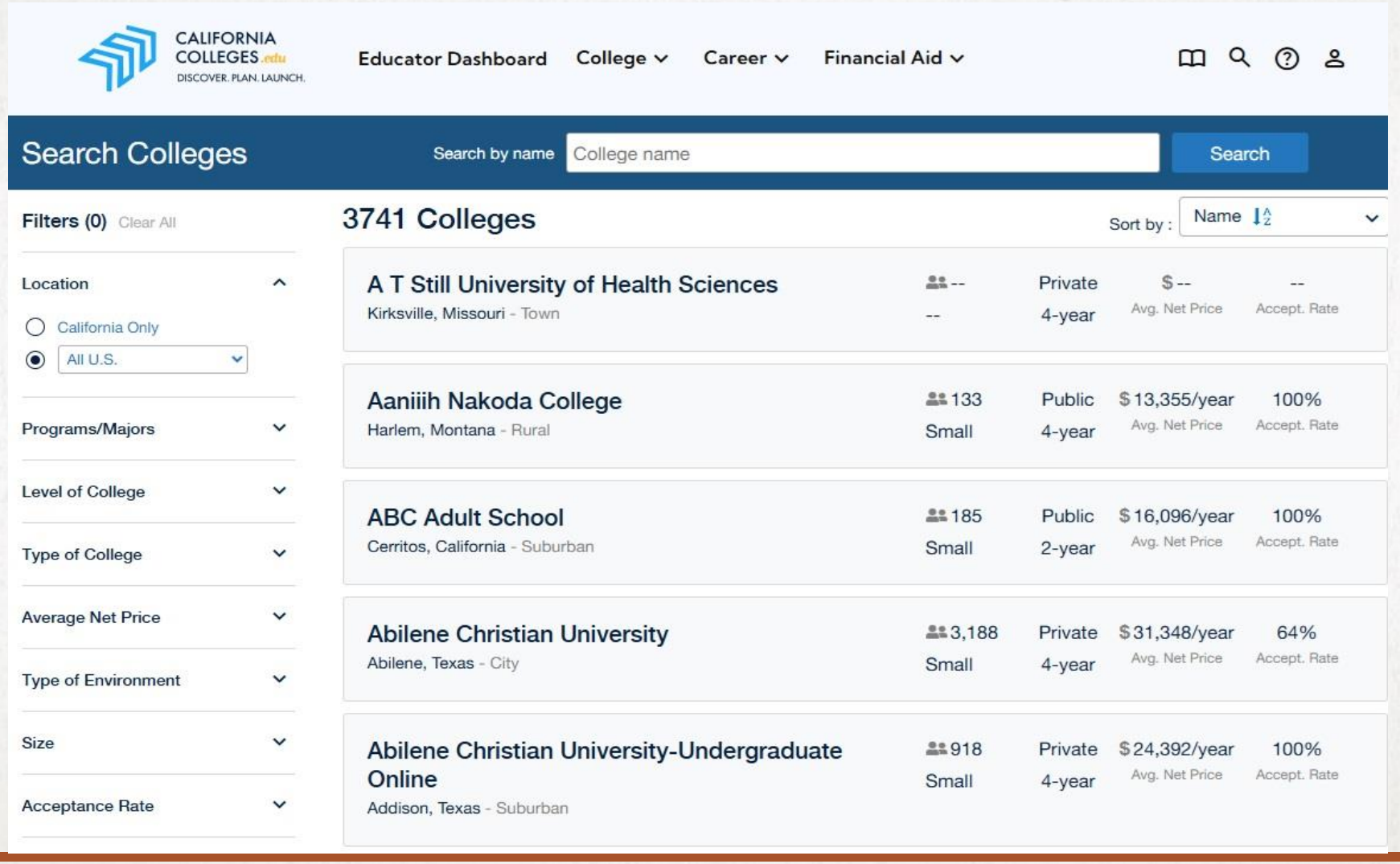
CALIFORNIA COLLEGES.edu

DISCOVER. PLAN. LAUNCH.

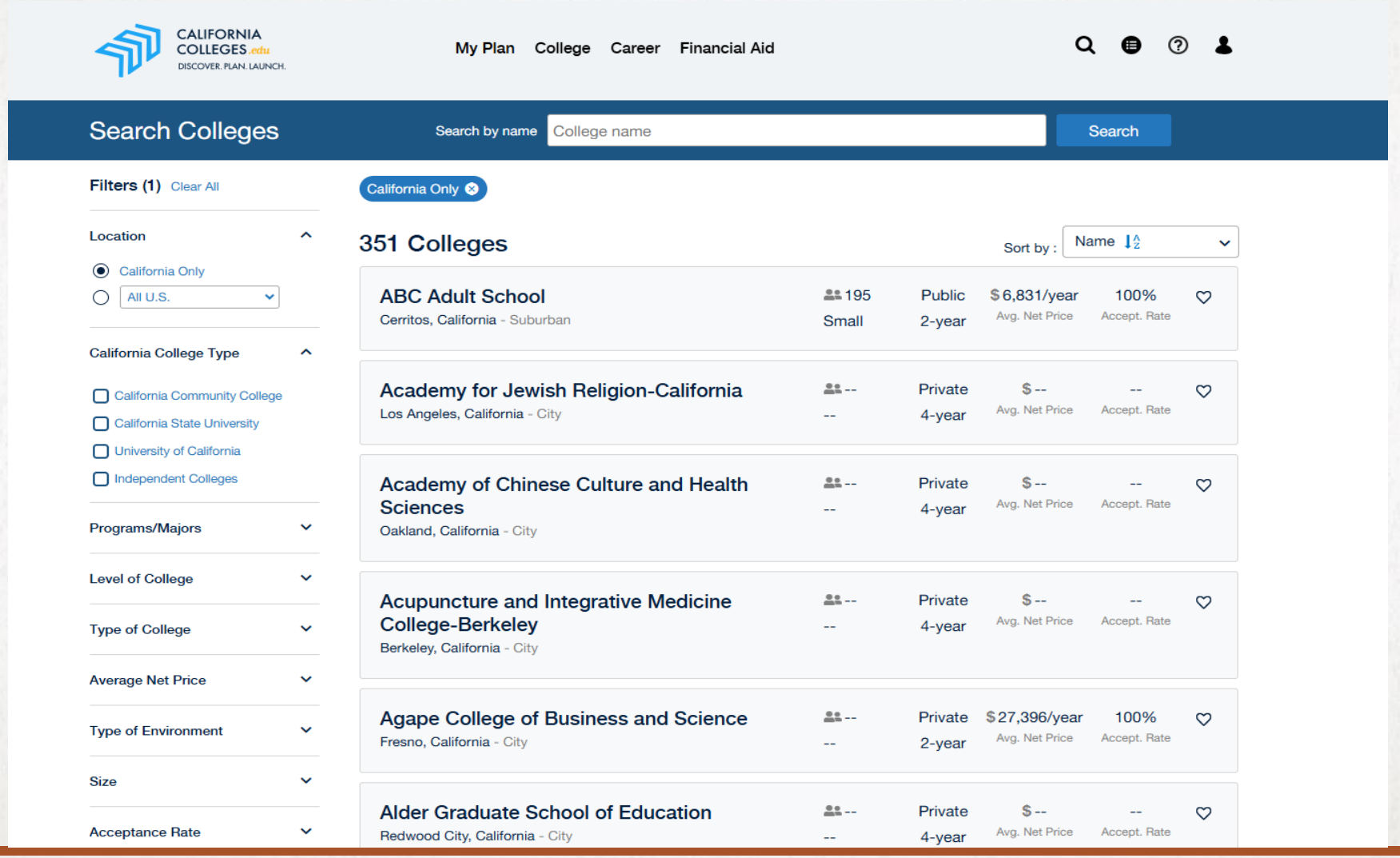
The State of California's Official College and Career Planning Platform

https://www.californiacolleges.edu/#/ (Live Link! ☆)

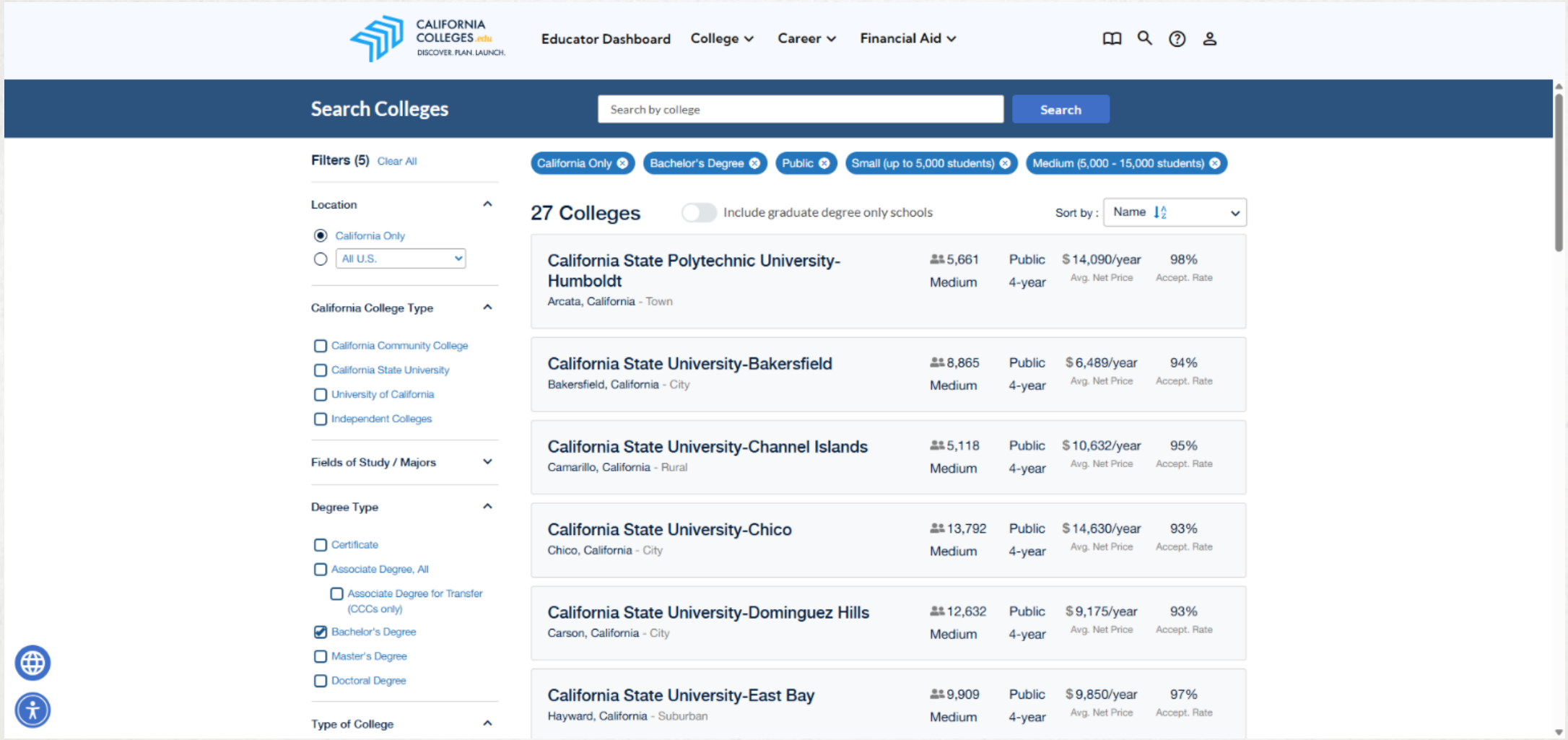
College Search Tool



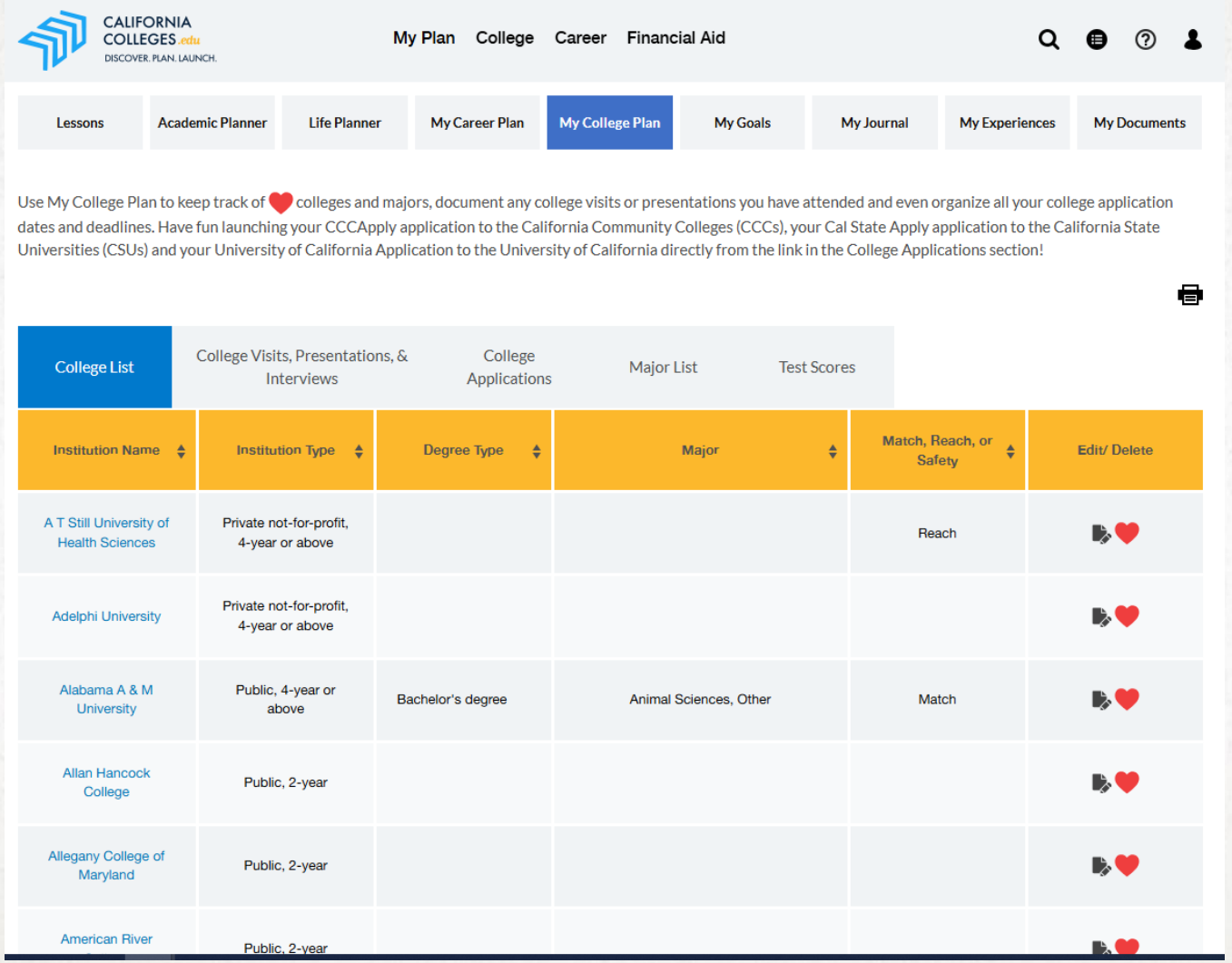
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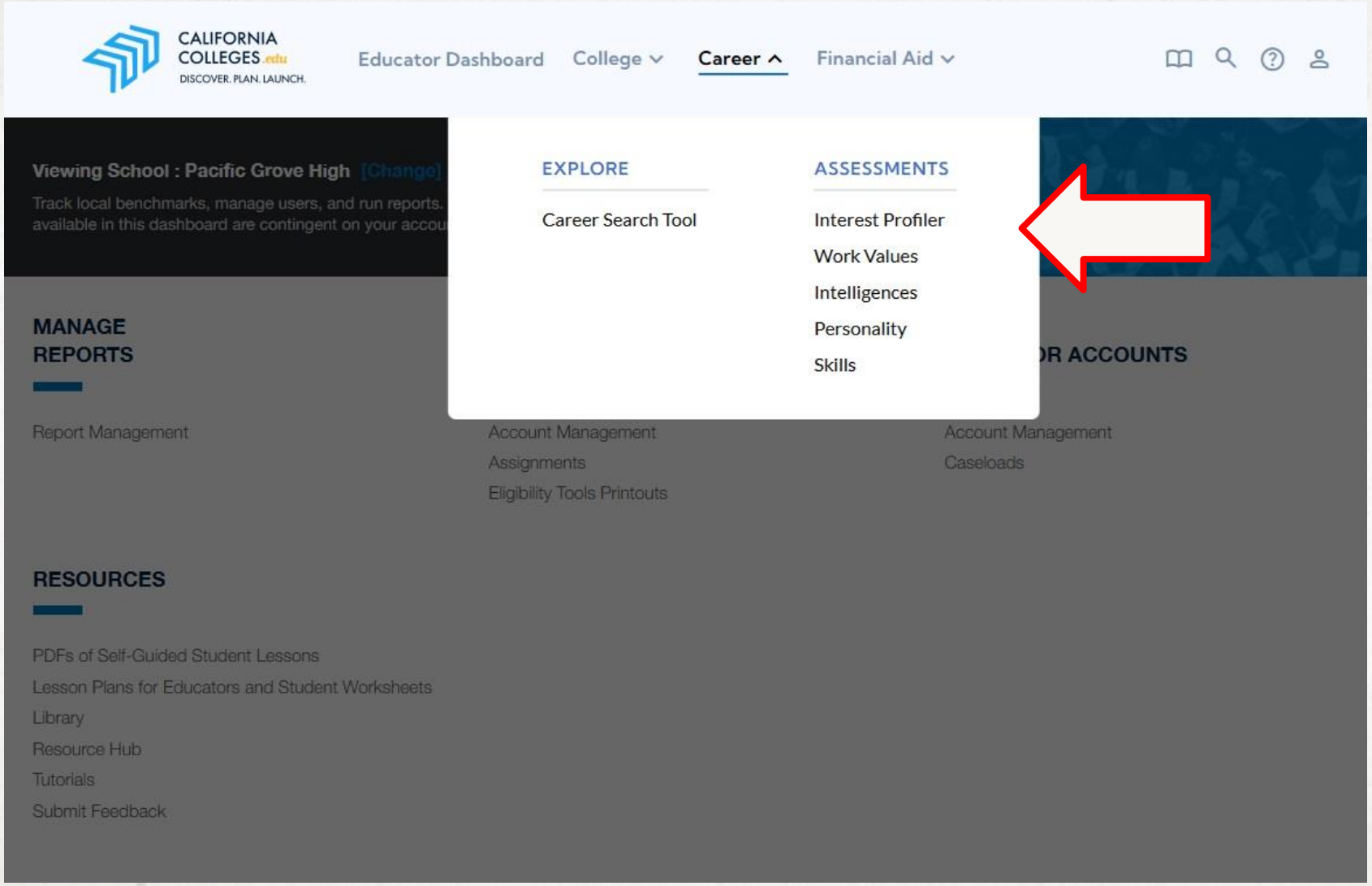
College Search Tool



Saved College List



What to Study



What is the Common Data Set (CDS)?

- Gathering information about colleges and universities takes a lot of work. While much of the information you are interested in is likely on the college's webpage, each school displays it's data in its own unique format.
- This is where the **Common Data Set**, or CDS, comes in. The CDS compiles some of the most important facts and figures about a college in a standardized format that all participating schools use. You can compare apples to apples!
  - A. General Information
  - B. Enrollment and Persistence
  - **C. First-Time, First-Year (Freshman) Admission**
  - D. Transfer Admission
  - E. Academic Offerings and Policies:
  - F. Student Life
  - G. Annual Expenses
  - **H. Financial Aid**
  - I. Instructional Faculty and Class Size.
  - J. Disciplinary Areas of Degrees Conferred
- You can find a school's Common Data Set by **Googling the school name** and **Common Data Set**

Common Data Set (CDS) Cal Poly, SLO (example)

CalPoly SLO Common Data Set 2025 (Live Link! ☆)

Common Data Set 2025-2026

C. FIRST-TIME, FIRST-YEAR ADMISSION

C1-C2: Applications

C1. First-time, first-year students: Provide the number of degree-seeking, first-time, first-year students who applied, were admitted, and enrolled (full- or part-time) in Fall 2025.

- ✓ Include early decision, early action, and students who began studies during summer in this cohort.
- ✓ Applicants should include only those students who fulfilled the requirements for consideration for admission (i.e., who completed actionable applications) and who have been notified of one of the following actions: admission, non- admission, placement on waiting list, or application withdrawn (by applicant or institution).
- ✓ Admitted applicants should include wait-listed students who were subsequently offered admission.
- ✓ Since the total may include students who did not provide gender data, the detail need not sum to the total.
- ✓ In cases where gender information is not provided, IPEDS recommends distributing across the two-binary categories. However, the "Other" category can be used to report non-binary or missing data.
- ✓ Note that recent high school graduates and other students without prior postsecondary experience will still be considered "first-time students" for fall enrollment reporting purposes even if they enrolled in the summer prior to fall enrollment. Provide numbers of students for each of the following categories as of the institution's official fall reporting date or as of October 15, 2025.

FIRST-TIME, FIRST-YEAR STUDENT APPLICANTS	TOTAL
Total first-time, first-year men who applied	34449
Total first-time, first-year women who applied	35349
Total first-time, first-year unknown sex who applied	1511

FIRST-TIME, FIRST-YEAR STUDENT ADMITS	TOTAL
Total first-time, first-year men who were admitted	8812
Total first-time, first-year women who were admitted	12061
Total first-time, first-year unknown sex who were admitted	494

FIRST-TIME, FIRST-YEAR STUDENT ENROLLEES	TOTAL
Total first-time, first-year men who enrolled	2416
Total first-time, first-year women who enrolled	2924
Total first-time, first-year unknown sex who enrolled	116

FIRST-TIME, FIRST-YEAR STUDENT ENROLLEES BY STATUS	TOTAL
Total full-time, first-time, first-year men who enrolled	2410
Total part-time, first-time, first-year men who enrolled	6
Total full-time, first-time, first-year women who enrolled	2918
Total part-time, first-time, first-year women who enrolled	6
Total full-time, first-time, first-year unknown sex who enrolled	116
Total part-time, first-time, first-year unknown sex who enrolled	0

	Units Required	Units Recommended
Total academic units	15.00	21.00
English	4.00	5.00
Mathematics	4.00	5.00
Science	2.00	4.00
Of these, units that must be lab	2.00	2.00
Foreign language	2.00	4.00
Social studies	1.00	1.00
History	1.00	1.00
Academic electives	1.00	1.00
Computer Science	0.00	0.00
Visual/Performing Arts	1.00	2.00
Other *(specify)*	0.00	0.00

Score Range	Percent (Students who submitted scores)	Percent (Students who did not submit scores)	Percent (All enrolled students)
Percent who had GPA of 4.0	71.46	61.62	63.77
Percent who had GPA between 3.75 and 3.99	17.76	22.77	21.68
Percent who had GPA between 3.50 and 3.74	7.83	10.86	10.19
Percent who had GPA between 3.25 and 3.49	2.53	3.48	3.28
Percent who had GPA between 3.00 and 3.24	0.25	0.92	0.77
Percent who had GPA between 2.50 and 2.99	0.17	0.35	0.31
Percent who had GPA between 2.0 and 2.49	0.00	0.00	0.00
Percent who had GPA between 1.0 and 1.99	0.00	0.00	0.00
Percent who had GPA below 1.0	0.00	0.00	0.00
Totals should = 100%	100.00	100.00	100.00

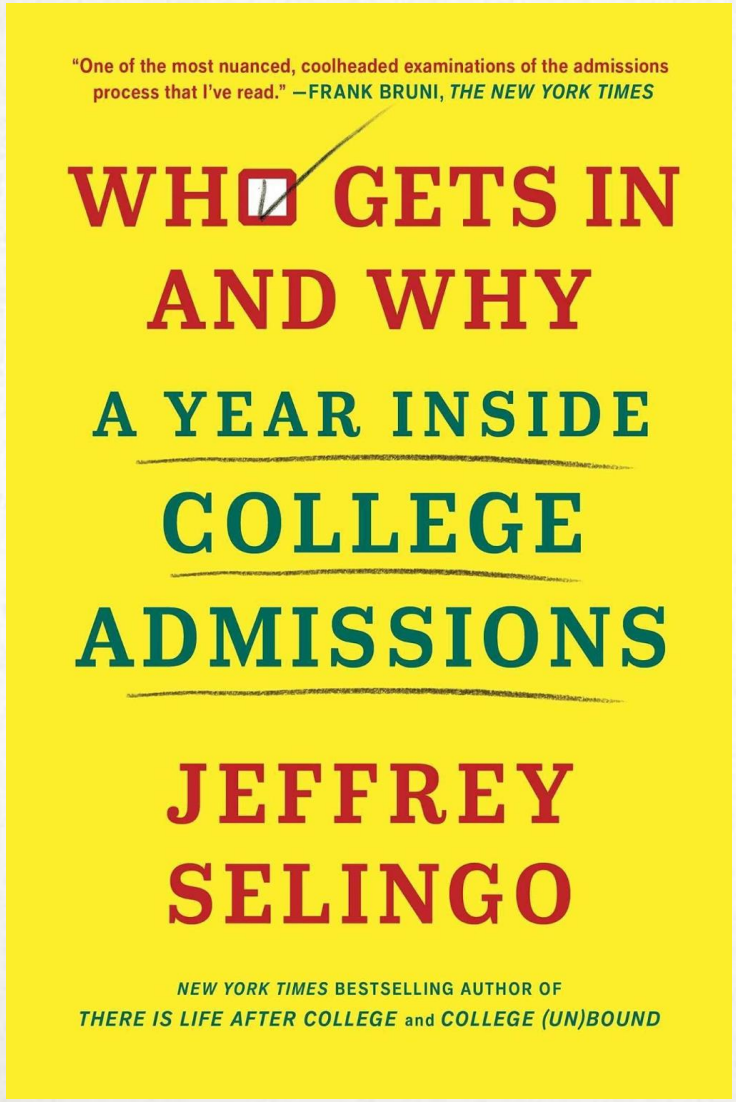
Crossroads of Fit and Affordability

- College can be one of the most significant financial investments a person makes in their lifetime
- Often high school students and families wait until college acceptance letters are received before actively discussing how the student will pay for college
  - Delaying these conversations until the Spring of a student's senior year places increased pressure on the student and family to make significant financial decisions in a very short window of time
- **Therefore, families should consider including affordability in the student's College Fit exploration and balanced College List**



Which Colleges Are Really Buyers and Which Are Sellers - Jeff Selingo

(Live Link! ☆)



Book Review:

Who Gets In and Why: A Year Inside College Admissions

by Jeffrey Selingo

- Deep dive into the nuts and bolts of college admissions
- A good resource for a parent/guardian that wants to understand more of 'why' and 'how' of admissions
- Thought-provoking chapters on Early Action/Early Decision and Paying for College
- Concept of Buyers vs. Sellers

Buyers versus Sellers (Jeffrey Selingo)

BUYERS

- Offer superior education to students
- Less recognizable names, often because they do not have sports teams that play on ESPN
- May offer more merit based aid to attract competitive students
- Schools with lower YIELDS are more likely to offer increased merit aid to strong students
- The majority of colleges are ‘buyers’

SELLERS

- Offer superior education to students
- Typically a ‘brand name’ school that signals prestige in the job market or social circles
- Significant numbers of highly qualified students compete for a select number of admissions
- More likely to prioritize financial aid to those in the lowest socioeconomic ranges
- Often have high YIELDS even if students have to pay full tuition and fees if accepted

Buyers versus Sellers at the UC

UC Merced

- UC Regents Scholarship (Live Link! ☆)
  - Four year scholarship for UC Merced students regardless of financial need
- Major changes allowed with prerequisites and grades
- 2025 Yield: 4-7%

UCLA

- UCLA Financial Aid (Live Link! ☆)
  - More traditional distribution of aid based on demonstrated family need.
- More difficult to change majors
- 2025 Yield: estimated @ 48%

Community College for Transfer Pathway

Students who plan to attend MPC for one or two years and then transfer to complete their four year degree should still prioritize exploring their personal college fit and create a potential college list.

- Students attending MPC after graduation can take advantage of potential college credit for AP scores of 3, 4, or 5
    - MPC AP/MPC Course Equivalents (Live Link! ☆)
- Explore taking Dual Enrollment Classes at MPC during 11th and 12th grade
- Register ***early in the Spring*** of the student's senior year to ensure optimal course selection
- **Meet with their MPC Counselor at least once per year, preferably every term, to solidify their Educational Plan**

Community College for Transfer Pathway

The UCs and CSUs have transfer programs to support students who have completed their **Associate Degrees for Transfer (AA-T/AS-T)**.

- The UC: Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) (Live Link ☆)
- The CSU: Associate Degree for Transfer | California Community Colleges - Enroll Today (Live Link ☆)

CA Community Colleges offer the CA Promise Grant (Live Link ☆) to full-time students

This can provide a second chance to apply at a preferred 4-year college

Questions & Answers

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