



Choosing a college isn't a four-year decision; it's a 40-year decision. From campus to classes, academics to culture, there's a lot to consider. And, often, students don't even know what they want in a college experience. To help your student-athlete better understand their best college match, you can start by asking them the right questions. In this article, we provide 20 questions to gauge academic and cultural fit.

We are not covering questions for determining athletic fit, as that is an entire topic in itself. These questions can help you start a list of potential colleges, and you can add athletic fit to whittle down your choices.

Remember: You're trying to figure out what your student wants in a school, not what you as a parent want for them. A lot of parents will frame questions by giving an obvious bias to one answer. For example, "Do you want to just be another number in a class with 500 kids in it?" Instead, phrase questions so your student-athlete can share what they really think.

It might be tempting to try grinding through all 20 questions at once. But, you'll likely get a lot of eye rolls and, "Ugh, I don't know!" responses. Instead, ask a couple questions at a time and keep track of the answers in a notebook. That way, you can refer back when you need to.

## Ask these 20 questions to see where your student should go to school.

**Academics.** To parents, academics may be the most important aspect of determining best college match. For high school students, academics may be the first thing they push to the side. These questions help narrow down schools where your student would thrive academically.

1. What do you want to major in?
2. Would you be willing to adjust your major?

3. Do you want to be taught by full-time professors or graduate students?
4. Which type of classes do you prefer: lecture style or discussion style?
5. Will your major require an internship?
6. Do you want to take classes that interest you or would you like to stick to your major?
7. Is the prestige/reputation of the college important to you?
8. Do you fulfill the academic requirements to be accepted?

**Culture.** When students go to college, most of them will be living on their own for the first time. They need to feel at home in their university, surrounded by students who they can connect with. Campus culture refers to the type of students at the campus, the location, physical attributes of the campus and what stands out in the student body.

9. Are you more interested in a social campus, a commuter campus (where students tend to go home on the weekends) or a quiet campus?
10. How far away from home would you like to be?
11. Would you prefer to go to a school where you already know a lot of people?
12. What are your weather-related deal breakers?
13. Do need a lot of green space?
14. Do you prefer to be in a large city?
15. Would you like a religious university?
16. What kinds of extracurricular or social activities are you interested in?
17. Do you want to be surrounded by people who share your viewpoint?
18. Do you want a diverse environment?
19. Do you like seeing people you know around campus every day?
20. What specific experiences do you want to have in college (e.g., studying abroad)?

## **Bonus: 5 financial questions for parents**

College is a huge investment. As a parent, you need to be realistic about what colleges are feasible from a financial standpoint. Ask yourself these questions to make sure you—and your student—know where things stand financially.

1. How much are you willing to pay for college and how much responsibility will fall on your student?
2. Does your student qualify for any scholarships or financial aid?
3. Will your student be supporting themselves while at college? Is the college town's cost of living realistic?
4. Will your student need to participate in a work-study program or similar arrangement to help cover the cost of tuition?
5. Are you and/or your student willing to take out college loans? How much?

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*USA TODAY High School Sports has a weekly column on the college recruiting process. Here, you'll find practical tips and real-world advice on becoming a better recruit to maximize your opportunities to play at the college level. Jaimie Duffek was one of the top 50 high school softball players in Illinois who went on to play outfield for Drake University. Jaimie is just one of many former college and professional players, college coaches, and parents who are part of the **Next College Student Athlete** team. Their knowledge, experience, and dedication along with NCSA's history of digital innovation, and long-standing relationship with the college coaching community have made NCSA the largest and most successful athletic recruiting network in the country.*