

## Lesson 6

### Selecting a College

**Materials Needed:**  
pen or pencil  
access to Internet or library



**Vocabulary:** These words will help you understand this lesson.

Word/Term	Definition
<b>associate's degree</b>	degree awarded after successfully completing a required program of study in a community or technical college; usually a 2 year program of approximately 60 credit hours; many can transfer into a bachelor's degree program
<b>bachelor's degree</b>	undergraduate degree granted by four-year colleges and universities; approximately 120-128 hours are typically needed to finish school with this degree

#### Journal Entry

So you are thinking about college. Most likely you are undecided about which college to select. Let's say you have a choice. You have some initial decisions to make. Do you want a big university or a small community college? Do you want the college to be near where you live or a distance away? Are you looking for a specific type of college - technical, liberal arts, agricultural, private, or public? You've just started making decisions. In your journal write your thoughts on your preference for college.

### **Looking Towards the Unknown**

So now, young scholar, you are standing at the brink of the unknown. You are working on completing your year requirements and the next stage of your life looms on the horizon. You may have decided that college is your next step after high school, or you may at least be seriously considering this option. If you have decided that either four-year college or a two-year vocational program is the path you would like to take, you have some big questions to face, including, “Where will I go?” and “What would I really want to be or accomplish with my life as an adult?” If you have decided that college is not in your near future, knowing the steps it takes to get there will still be beneficial if and when you decide to pursue your post-secondary education.

### **Taking the First Steps**

#### **Step 1: Thinking About Your Future**

Knowing what career you would like to have will help immensely in your search for your “dream” college. If you have an idea, even a general idea, of what you would like to do for a career, your college search will be a bit easier. However, if you are totally unsure of what you would like to do, don’t worry; many students enter college without having decided on a major field of study. The first thing you should do is write down a list of all of the careers that interest you; then, try to find a common link among them. Read the list below. Then, on the following line, explain what these careers have in common.

teacher          doctor          nurse          social worker          therapist

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If you said that the careers all deal with helping others or serving the public in some way, you were right. Now, read the second list and try to identify the similarities among these careers.

manager          computer technician          business owner          banker

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If you said that the careers listed all deal with business and business management in some way, you were right. Now it is your turn. In the space below, list at least five careers that you might pursue. Star one or two that especially interest you.

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Do you see a link among the careers you listed? Your link does not need to include all of the careers you listed, but it should include the majority of them. What do they have in common?

### Your Academic Assessment

Before we go any further give yourself a quiz.

Did you take challenging courses in high school? \_\_\_\_\_

How did you do on the SATs/ACTs? poorly \_\_\_\_\_ , well \_\_\_\_\_ , very well \_\_\_\_\_

What were your best subjects? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you have difficulty with some courses? Is so, what? \_\_\_\_\_

Do your grades and test scores reflect your ability? \_\_\_\_\_

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel prepared for college level work? \_\_\_\_\_

Has anything held you back in your high school career? \_\_\_\_\_

These are some things you should share with your counselor or mentor. They are factors to consider when selecting colleges.

## Step 2: A Look at Your Options

### What's Out There?

People use the word **college** to refer to many different types of schools. Take a look at the different types of colleges to gain a solid understanding of the options you'll have when you start researching schools. There are thousands of colleges in the United States. There has to be one that is right for you. The difference between a college and a university is that a college offers a collection of degrees in one specific area, while a university is a collection of colleges. When you go to a university you are going to be graduating from one of their colleges, such as the business college. As to which is better, it depends on what you want. Single colleges tend to be smaller while universities are usually bigger.



### Types of Colleges and Universities

**Community or Junior Colleges** – These types of colleges frequently offer technical programs that prepare you for the job market. An associate's degree is usually awarded after successfully completing a two year program. Some programs are strictly academic and designed to prepare students to transfer to four-year institutions for a bachelor's degree. Others are more practical and provide career training in specific areas. A small number of two-year colleges offer the final two years of the undergraduate program, awarding the bachelor's degree at completion.

**Liberal Arts Colleges** – These colleges offer mostly courses in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Most are private with relatively small classes. Both the **college** and **university** award the bachelor's degree. The Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) or Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degrees are the most common bachelor's degrees typically awarded following successful completion of a four-year, full-time program. Programs in some fields of study or at some institutions can be longer than four years.

**Universities** – Generally these are bigger than colleges and they offer more majors. Some classes may be taught by graduate students. The degrees awarded include the bachelor’s degree, but offer a greater variety of degrees.

**Agricultural, Technical, and Specialized Colleges** – These specialized colleges prepare you for specific careers. Examples include: Art/music, Bible, Business, Health Science, and Teaching, among many others. Some are 2 year colleges; some 4 year.

Choices within these four groups include private or public (usually less expensive than private) institutions; single sex schools, religiously affiliated colleges, Historically Black colleges, and Hispanic-serving institutes. To search for colleges go to **A to Z College Search** listings or search **colleges State-by-State**.

### **Wait ... There Are More Choices**

Are you looking for a two year college or a four year college? Does your future career require a bachelor’s degree? Have you decided on a definite field of study? Then part of the selection process is done because you will only look at colleges or universities that offer that major. Do you want a rural environment or a large city? How far from home do you want to be? Can you afford travel expenses? Would you like to commute? These decisions will narrow the choice quite a bit. What kind of living arrangements are you hoping for – single sex dorms, coed dorms, off campus apartments, or will you be commuting from home? What kind of extracurricular activities are you interested in? How many of these questions do you have a definite answer for? Keep these possibilities in mind as you search for your college.

### **Your Major**

Your *major* is the area in which you concentrate your studies. Students will say that they are accounting, education, or math *majors*. Some students enter college knowing what subject they want as a major; others enter college as *undeclared*, which means they have not stated or chosen a major field of study. If you choose to go to a four-year college, you may want to spend the first year taking classes in a variety of fields. This will help you decide which area

of study interests you most. If you have not done so check out the web site MyMajors at [www.mymajors.com](http://www.mymajors.com) List five majors you might consider. Then rank the choice of the majors you have selected from most desired to least desired.

If you do have a planned major or know what majors most interest you, look for colleges that offer strong programs in these subjects. For example, if you want to be an engineer, it would not be in your best interest to go to a liberal arts school. You should research technical schools that offer strong programs in math and science.

Have you taken the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) and/or the ACT (American College Test)? At least one of these tests is required for admittance to most four year colleges. If you have not taken the SAT or ACT, one of your first priorities should be to take one or both. Or, if you are unhappy with your score, take the test again. Your counselor will have information about test times and locations or you can find out online at the SAT and ACT web sites. There is a special lesson in this unit design to help you prepare for standardized tests.

### **Step 3: Seek Some Guidance**

Visit the guidance or career counselor or your mentor at either your home-base high school or another high school. Hopefully this person can go over the things you have been considering and suggest some colleges you may want to further investigate. If you are unable to meet with a counselor right away, review your options and keep in mind your goal.



#### **Step 4: Researching the Schools**

##### **Where to Look**

After the counselor has looked over your career list, reviewed your answers to additional questions and discussed other important information, he or she may have suggestions for your next step, which is to start researching some colleges. You may begin doing this by looking through catalogues and brochures in a high school guidance office or library. Even if you already have your heart set on a college, look into some others. You may discover that another school is better suited for you. Write down the addresses of schools from which you would like an application.

Another great source for information is the Internet. If you have access to the Internet, you should definitely consider using it in your search. For example, if you are interested in going to a state college in Illinois, you might search under “colleges in Illinois.” If you do this, information from several Illinois schools should surface. The Internet provides a wealth of information about almost all colleges. For most colleges you can see pictures of the campus, learn about academic majors, as well as campus activities and athletics. You can request a catalog online.

Research to determine which college best fits your needs. Look to a college that suits your needs, not those of the people around you. **Don’t** rule out a college based on cost alone at this point. Finally, if possible, visit some of the schools that interest you. Do not worry if you cannot do this right away. It can be done at a later point. Or, you may consider visiting a local college. Even if you are not interested in attending this college, visiting will familiarize you with the college atmosphere.

**It's Time to Make a List of Possible Colleges**

1. Make a list of at least 3 colleges you would consider. Don't stop at 3 if you find others you want to explore.

a.

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b.

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c.

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d.

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e.

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f.

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Now, find out ...

– the programs the college offers

– the cost of tuition

– the size of the college (classes size, if you can)

– the reputation of the college

– activities available

2. At a first glance what are the advantages of the ones you have listed?

a.

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b.

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3. From your point of view what are the disadvantages?

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d.

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### **Requesting Information and an Application**

Once you have discovered four to five colleges that capture your interest and seem to complement your personality and career path, you will need to write to those schools to request additional information and an application. You may want to use the sample letter at the end of this lesson as a guide. If you have access to the Internet you can apply online

### **Organize**

Create a separate folder for each college.

### **If possible -**

Visit as many colleges as you can. Talk to students who attend the college or who have attended the college. Audit (sit in on) a class.

**Your mailing address**

**Date**

Admissions Office

College mailing address

(This will be in the college listings in the high school office, library or on the Internet.)

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a student at (name of high school) making plans for college. Please send an application, course catalogue, and information about scholarships and other financial aid to the address above.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

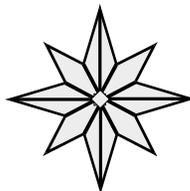
(your signature)

Your name (typed)



**NOTES or questions for your mentor / teacher:**

**Congratulations! You are making plans for your future.**



**End of Lesson 6**