

Choosing a College

The **BIG** Idea

- How can I identify colleges to consider for education after high school?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm Up: My Dream School
(5 minutes)
- II. Safety, Match, Reach: College Search Vocabulary (5 minutes)
- III. Online College Search
(25 minutes)
- IV. My Calendar of Deadlines
(5 minutes)
- V. Wrap Up: All Aboard?
(5 minutes)

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Learn about reach, match, and safety schools.
- Register and explore the school selector tool at www.petersons.com.
- Develop a “Top Ten” list of colleges.
- Order materials from these schools to be mailed home.

MATERIALS

PORTFOLIO PAGES:

- Portfolio page 12, List of Top Ten Schools
- Portfolio pages 13 - 22, My Top Ten Schools

STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:

- Student Handbook page 139, My Dream School
- Student Handbook pages 140-142, Online College Search Steps
- Student Handbook page 143, Calendar of Deadlines

FACILITATOR PAGES:

- Facilitator Resource 1, Safety, Match, Reach: College Search Vocabulary

Overhead and/or LCD projector

OVERVIEW

As students near the end of 11th grade, it's time to start zeroing in on some realistic college choices, and identifying schools that might be "a good fit." This lesson, and the three that follow, will help students do this. Key to the process is personal assessment and college research. Students must evaluate career goals, think about lifestyle preferences, assess academic standing, factor in finances, research schools, and compare the results. Luckily, this process can be streamlined by using an online college search tool.

In this lesson, students go online to www.petersons.com and complete the "College Search" questionnaire. They identify approximately ten schools that make up a good personal list of reach, match, and safety schools. They will order informational materials from these schools. In addition, they will review a list of suggested steps for junior and senior years.

PREPARATION

- Talk to the school counselor and collaborate on ways to facilitate the process of choosing colleges.
- If, during the course of facilitating these lessons, you encounter questions you can't answer, please consult your school counselor to make sure you're providing the most accurate and up-to-date information.
- Go to www.petersons.com and become familiar with the site and its offerings. Register yourself as a student, and go through the process of conducting a college search, so you know the ins and outs and tricky sections.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
 - **Facilitator Resource 1, Safety, Match, Reach: College Search Vocabulary**
 - **Student Handbook page 143, Calendar of Deadlines**
 - **Student Handbook pages 140-142, Online College Search Steps**
 - **Portfolio pages 13 - 22, My Top Ten Schools**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Developing a realistic list of college choices sounds easier than it is. There are many factors to consider, and it takes time, effort and research, and the process involves a personal honesty and self-awareness that may not be comfortable or familiar. But ultimately, it's empowering for students to think about who they are and what they want, and to develop a list of schools that will be right for *them*.

VOCABULARY

Safety School: a school where you'll almost surely be accepted because your grades and exam scores are higher than the requirements.

Match School: a school where you think you'd be happy academically and socially, and where you fall into the middle of their GPA and ACT/SAT score range.

Reach School: a top choice or "dream" school that is less likely to accept you because it is highly competitive and/or because your academics are just equal to, or fall short of, the school's requirements.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

For the remainder of the unit, students considering tech and trade schools may continue to research these options. Encourage students considering these postsecondary choices to research community colleges or four-year schools in their field of interest if there is any chance they may go to these types of schools. Students considering entering the military should compare this choice with civilian options.

There may not be as much information readily available for tech and trade schools, so students considering these choices need to be proactive, making phone calls to gather information they need to make decisions. If you can enlist the help of your school counselor or host teacher to assist in troubleshooting these issues as students work independently, that would be helpful.

It is highly unlikely that your students will complete their research for all ten schools during class time. Feel free to reduce the number of schools students are required to research to 4 or 5. Students be should strongly encouraged to complete the research for the rest of their schools on their own time.

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

1. [As students enter, direct them to **Student Handbook page 139, My Dream School**. Give them 2 to 3 minutes to answer the questions.]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** How many of you found it easy to imagine yourself in college, and picture the details of that dream school? [Students respond.] And how many of you thought, “Um, ah, gee, well...I really don’t have a clue!” [Students respond, probably in the majority.] Well, if you were in the “um, er, well, I dunno” group, you’re probably in the majority. Most juniors don’t know where they’ll end up after high school, and find it hard to visualize their future. And even if you do have a dream school, after taking everything into consideration, it might not be where you end up wanting to go. So today we’re going to look at some of the factors that will help you decide where to apply.

II. Safety, Match, Reach: College Search Vocabulary (5 minutes)

1. [Place the transparency of **Facilitator Resource 1, Safety, Match, Reach: College Search Vocabulary** on the overhead projector.]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** In a moment we’ll go to a website where you’ll answer a questionnaire to help focus your college search, and develop a list of prospective schools. But first, let’s look at the three different categories of schools you should end up with on your list. They’re called safety, match, and reach schools. Let’s start with “safety.” What’s a **safety school**?

[Ask a student to read aloud the definition for **safety school**.]

Okay, so a safety school is one where you’re almost certain to be admitted, based on your current GPA and the scores of any standardized college exams you’ve already taken.

[Ask a student to read aloud the definition for **match school**.]

That’s right. A match school is one where you feel you’d fit in, and you fall into the middle of their GPA and ACT/SAT score range, so there’s a good chance you’ll be accepted.

[Ask a student to read aloud the definition for **reach school**.]

Okay, so a reach school is a big “maybe”—worth reaching for, because you’re passionate about applying to that particular school, or because you might end up boosting your grades and scores before applying and it’s worth a try.

III. Online College Search (25 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now let’s go to www.petersons.com, an online college search engine with a questionnaire that will help you develop a list of choices that will include safety, match, and reach schools. It’s a little like “E-Harmony,” except you end up with a list of possible colleges...instead of a list of possible dates!
2. [Write www.petersons.com on the board, and tell students to go to the site. As they are finding it, explain that in addition to generating a list of schools they can print out and take home, Petersons will give them the option to click on individual college websites, where they can request information to be mailed to them at home.]
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** We’ll go through the basic part of the questionnaire together, step by step, but please know that you have the same information on **Student Handbook page 140 - 142, Online College Search Steps**, so if you get lost or want to move ahead more quickly, you can use that as your guide. Raise your hand if you need more time to find the website. [Wait if necessary.] Okay, let’s begin.
 - **New User Registration**
Look on the left of the page and select “New user? Register now!” Go ahead and fill out the “Account Registration” information. Use your personal email address to register, and make a note of your username and password.

Where it says “Primary Educational Interest,” click on **Going to College**.

Where it asks “What Best Describes You,” select **Student** from the drop-down menu.

Create a username and password and make a note of these on the top of **Portfolio page 12, List of Top Ten Schools**.

When you come to the question asking for a major of choice, pick one if you have any idea what you’re interested in studying. Choose “undecided” if you don’t know yet.

Under “What type of program”, you can select more than one.

When you reach the “Congrats” page, go ahead and click on **Go to My Peterson’s now!** And know that, anytime you like, you can go back on your own to this website, and investigate the many others options you won’t have time to pursue today.

- **My Peterson’s Planner**

On this page, select **Schools and Programs**. Note the “Specialized Program Search.” For today, choose **College Search**.

- **Colleges and Universities**

Drop down to the middle of the page, where you see “Detailed College Search.” You will see 5 categories you can choose to answer questions about: Basics, Student Body, Getting In, Academics and Campus Life. Select the **Basics** category along with two others that interest you. Then click on **continue**. Since everyone will be choosing “Basics” we’ll do that section together. Then, you’ll each continue on your own.

- **Peterson’s College Search - Basics**

The navigation on this page for the section marked “Location” is a bit tricky. You must click on your choice on the left, then click the red arrow (>) to actually select the choice. Make sure you see what you picked (ie United States, Mid-Atlantic States, etc) move to the right-side box. It’s okay to pick more than one selection.

When you get to “Tuition,” click **doesn’t matter**. Financial aid may put expensive schools within your reach. It’s a good strategy to apply to several schools that vary in cost, so that if you don’t get the financial aid you’d planned on, you have a less expensive Plan B.

Continue to the bottom of this page. Then, click **continue** and keep going on your own. Raise your hand if you need help or have a question. And, as you’ll see on the bottom of each page, you can stop and save your list at any time. You can also create a new list, with different requirements. Today we want to continue until you have an initial list of colleges to print out. But you can return to this site and generate new lists, at any time.

[Circulate to make sure everyone's comfortable with the process.]

[Ask for students to raise their hands if they also selected "Academics." Suggest they listen to your instructions for choosing "Your Degree", "Your Major", and "Special Programs and Services." Then continue as follows:]

- **Academics:**

- Your Degree**

- If you want to go to a four-year college, click **Bachelors** and if you want to go to a two-year college, click "Associates." If you want to go to a technical or trade school, click **Professional Certification**.

- Your Major**

- This section might seem tricky. First, "Choose a Category," which is Step 1.

- This activates Step 2, "Choosing a Major." Choose a major, then click **Add**, so it appears in Step 3, "View Your Selected Majors." You can choose several categories and majors, but you must go through this 3-step process each time to have it recorded. Check to make sure everything you selected appears in "Step 3: View Your Selected Majors" before moving on. Make sure you choose the option that says "Schools that have **any** of these majors."

- Special Programs and Services**

- For all of the Special Programs and Services options, you are free to select any special program you are interested in. If you do not know what one or more program or service means, feel free to skip that section.

[Ask for students to raise their hands if they also selected "Campus Life." Suggest they listen to your instructions for choosing "Sports," as it has to be done a certain way. Continue as follows:]

- **Campus Life: Sports**

- You must click on the orange prompt each time to add a choice. You cannot pick three choices, click the prompt, and expect to see them. They must be chosen one at a time.

[Give students some time to work. Then ask for their attention so you can go over instructions regarding "Your Results." Continue as follows:]

- **Getting In: GPA**

Remember the scale:

4.0 = A

3.0 = B

2.0 = C

1.0 = D

- **Your Results**

When you reach the end of your survey, click on **Your Results**. To save the schools and create a “Saved Search,” you must click the box for each school, and then click **Save**. Now, see what you selected by going to “My Saved Schools.”

Don’t worry if you don’t recognize all the schools on your list. If there is a school that you really love that didn’t come up in your results list, you can still research it. But make sure to stay open minded; a school you’ve never heard of could be the perfect fit for your interests and career goals.

[Make sure everyone is with you now, following along. Then instruct students to record their top 10 choices on **Portfolio page 12, List of Top Ten Schools**. NOTE: Students can also list five schools from their list and five other schools that they are interested in researching.

Then have students turn to **Portfolio pages 13-22, My Top Ten Schools**. Instruct students to record the name of each college along with the info listed under the General Info box (top left). The information in this box can be found on students’ “My Saved Schools” list. (The SAT and ACT scores listed show the range for the middle half of entering freshman.) NOTE: To find the website, students will need to click on the school’s name and then scroll down to the bottom of the page.

[Circulate and make sure everyone is printing out, or hand-writing, their list. If there are any students whose search did not generate a list, or who did not get at least ten schools, suggest they return to the survey later and request more general selections so that more schools will be included. Remind students that they will fill in the remaining information in the upcoming weeks.]

[If time permits have students request free information from their top schools. For each school they will need to click on **Get Free Info**. This will prompt students to supply their home address where the information can be sent.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Whenever you log into the website, you will see “My Saved Schools,” under “My Peterson’s Planner/My Tools & Resources.” Just click on this, and your schools will come up. You can also conduct new searches to develop different lists on your own, anytime. Remember to save your username and password so you can return to your results whenever you like.
4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** You’ve all done a great job today thinking about your future and coming up with a list of potential schools. If any of you feel you weren’t quite ready to make some of the decisions on the questionnaire, spend some time this week thinking about the basics: two- or four-year school, close to home or farther away, big or small campus, what you might be interested in studying. Then go back to the Petersons site, and do a new college search. See what comes up!

You can go through this process as many times as you like; no one will see your investigations, and the process of thinking about the future will ultimately help you pursue, and reach, your goals. If any of you feel ready to identify your top school choices, spend some time this week browsing the schools’ websites, getting to know them better. And in a day or so, start checking your mail! Read the pamphlets you get from the colleges you emailed today, and see if you can imagine yourself there. Eventually, I promise, you *will* find a school that’s just right for you.

IV. Wrap Up: My Calendar of Deadlines (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Great job completing the online college search tool. Take the list home, share it with your parents, and bring it to class next week. During that lesson, you’ll explore the schools you selected in greater detail.
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now, turn to **Student Handbook page 143, Calendar of Deadlines**. This list will help you organize for the rest of junior and senior year. Take a quick glance at it, as I read the points aloud.
3. [Read the calendar aloud. Field questions.]

Safety, Match, Reach College Search Vocabulary

Safety School: a school where you'll almost surely be accepted because your grades and exam scores are higher than the requirements.

Match School: a school where you think you'd be happy academically and socially, and where you fall into the middle of their GPA (grades) and ACT/SAT (standardized test) score range.

Reach School: a top choice or "dream" school that is less likely to accept you because it is highly competitive and/or because your academics are just equal to, or fall short of, the school's requirements.

My Dream School

Imagine you have a crystal ball and you can see into the future. You can see yourself after high school, enrolled at a college or school of higher education that is perfect for you. It has the right academics or training program, it's in the right setting, the other students are people you like, and the social, cultural, and/or sports activities are just what you want.

Describe the following about your dream school:

1. The setting (i.e. state or geographic region, city vs. country, big or small campus).

2. The subjects you're studying (i.e. nursing, mechanical engineering, liberal arts).

3. The other students (i.e. friendly, competitive, international, like/unlike me).

4. Social/cultural or sports events you'll go to this weekend (i.e. bluegrass concert, school dance, basketball game, pick-up game of dodge ball, art show).

Online College Search Steps

www.petersons.com

1. NEW USER REGISTRATION

- Look on the left of the page and choose “New user? Register now!”
- Fill out the “Account Registration” information. Use your personal email address to register.
- Where it says “Primary Educational Interest,” click on “Going to College.”
- Where it asks “What Best Describes You,” select “Student” from the drop-down menu.
- Create a username and password and make a note of these on the top of **Portfolio page x, List of Top Ten Schools**.
- Where it says “Major of Choice,” pick one of these from the drop-down menu. If you’re unsure about which major you want, select “Undecided.”
- Under “What type of program,” select as many as you like.
- On the “Congrats” page, choose “Go to My Peterson’s now!”

2. MY PETERSON’S PLANNER

- Choose “Schools and Programs.”
- Under “Specialized Programs,” choose “College Search.”

3. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

- Scroll down the page to the orange heading that says “Detailed College Search.”
- You will see five categories you can choose to answer questions about: “Basics,” “Student Body,” “Getting In,” “Academics,” and “Campus Life.” You **MUST** select **AT LEAST** the “Basics” category as well as **TWO** others. You select categories by checking the boxes and then clicking “Continue.”

4. PETERSON'S COLLEGE SEARCH – A few notes for the tricky sections

Under “Basics”: Location

- Click on a choice on the left, then click the red arrow (>) to actually select the choice. Make sure you see your choice (i.e. United States, Mid-Atlantic States, etc) move to the right-side box for it to work.
- It's okay to pick more than one selection.

Under “Basics”: Tuition

- Everyone should click on “Doesn't Matter” for the tuition question.

Under “Academics”: Your Degree

- If you want to go to a four-year college, click “Bachelors” and if you want to go to a two-year college, click “Associates.” If you want to go to a technical or trade school, click “Professional Certification.”

Under “Academics”: Your Major

- Step 1: Choose a category.
- Step 2: Choose a major. Choose “Add” to add it, so it appears in Step 3.
- Step 3: View your selected majors.
(**NOTE:** You can choose several categories and majors, but you must go through this 3-step process each time to have it recorded.)
- Step 4. Make sure you choose the option that says “Schools that have **any** of these majors.”

Under “Academics”: Special Programs and Services

- For all of the Special Programs and Services options, you are free to select any special program you are interested in. If you do not know what one or more program or service means, just skip those (don't click them).

Under “Campus Life”: Getting Active: Sports

- Make your choices. Note that the “Sports” section uses the orange prompts (>) so you must click on the prompt each time to add your choices.

Under “Getting In”: GPA

- Remember the scale:
4.0 = A
3.0 = B
2.0 = C
1.0 = D

5. YOUR RESULTS

- When you are done, you will see a list of “Your Results.” To save the schools and create a “Saved Search”, select the box for each school, and then click “Save.”
- See what you selected by going to “My Saved Schools.”
- Print your list of schools, or record your top ten schools on **Portfolio page 12, List of Top Ten Schools**. If there are schools that interest you that were not in your results, feel free to add them to your list. At least five schools need to come from Petersons.
- Then turn to **Portfolio pages 13-22, My Top Ten Schools**. Record the name of each college along with the info listed under the General Info box (top left). The information in this box can be found on your “My Saved Schools” list. (The SAT and ACT scores listed show the range for the middle half of entering freshman.) **NOTE:** To find each school’s website, click on the school’s name and then scroll down to the bottom of the page.
- Whenever you log onto the website, you can access “My Saved Schools”, under “My Peterson’s Planner/My Tools & Resources” using the username and password you created today.

Calendar of Deadlines

Junior Year

- Identify your top ten college choices: 3 safety, 3 match, 3 reach schools (plus one extra). Get information and application materials mailed to you at home.
- Take the ACT or SAT, and any other tests required for admission.
- If possible, visit your top college choices.
- About 400 colleges across the country offer the chance to apply early. If you already know where you want to go to school, talk to your school counselor about Early Action or Early Decision options. (See www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/the-application/104.html for details. And start working on your application this summer.)
- Ask teachers, counselors, or employers for letters of recommendation. Explain your goals and ambitions so they'll be more prepared to write about you. Check your application for the number of recommendations the school requires.

Senior Year

- Continue to visit schools.
- Finalize your college list.
- Stay on track with your grades and extracurricular activities.
- Take standardized tests if necessary.
- Make a calendar showing the application deadlines for admission, financial aid, and scholarships for your choice schools.
- Complete applications. Make sure you and your school's guidance office have sent all necessary materials, including test scores, recommendations, transcripts, and essays. Send in all of your materials early to make sure there is plenty of time to meet each school's application deadline.

For details, see www.petersons.com: "Get Started": Planning Timelines."

List of Top Ten Schools

Peterson's Username: _____

Peterson's Password: _____

My Top Ten Schools

Directions: Record the top ten schools from your Peterson's results page. If there are schools that interest you that were not in your results, feel free to add them to your list. Just make sure that at least five schools are from Peterson's.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

MY TOP TEN SCHOOLS

Name of College _____

My Info

My GPA: _____
 My Class Rank: _____
 My ACT score: _____
 My SAT score: _____

General Info (from www.petersons.com)

Location: _____
 Enrollment: _____
 Mid-50% SAT combined: _____
 Mid-50% ACT: _____
 Tuition (In-State/Out-of-state): _____
 Entrance Difficulty: _____
 Website: _____

Academic Info

(from www.collegeboard.com)

GPA:
 3.75+ _____
 3.5 – 3.74 _____
 25.25- 3.49 _____
 3.0 – 3.24 _____
 2.5 – 2.99 _____
 2.0 – 2.49 _____
 1.0– 1.99 _____
 below 1.0 _____
Class rank:
 Top tenth _____
 Top quarter _____
 Top half _____
 Bottom half _____
 Bottom quarter _____

Academic match?

Safety (I'm likely to get in) Good match A reach?

Student Population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity General comfort level 	
Campus Facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dorms Dining Halls Rec Center Library 	
Academics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majors Faculty Studios/Labs 	
Campus Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extracurricular Activities Sports Fraternity/Sorority 	
Off-Campus Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Things to Do Transportation 	

Is this school for me? Probably not Maybe Definitely

MY TOP TEN SCHOOLS

Name of College _____

My Info

My GPA: _____
 My Class Rank: _____
 My ACT score: _____
 My SAT score: _____

General Info (from www.petersons.com)

Location: _____
 Enrollment: _____
 Mid-50% SAT combined: _____
 Mid-50% ACT: _____
 Tuition (In-State/Out-of-state): _____
 Entrance Difficulty: _____
 Website: _____

Academic Info

(from www.collegeboard.com)

GPA:
 3.75+ _____
 3.5 – 3.74 _____
 25.25- 3.49 _____
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Campus Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extracurricular Activities Sports Fraternity/Sorority 	
Off-Campus Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Things to Do Transportation 	

Is this school for me? Probably not Maybe Definitely

MY TOP TEN SCHOOLS

Name of College _____

My Info

My GPA: _____
 My Class Rank: _____
 My ACT score: _____
 My SAT score: _____

General Info (from www.petersons.com)

Location: _____
 Enrollment: _____
 Mid-50% SAT combined: _____
 Mid-50% ACT: _____
 Tuition (In-State/Out-of-state): _____
 Entrance Difficulty: _____
 Website: _____

Academic Info

(from www.collegeboard.com)

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 3.5 – 3.74 _____
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Off-Campus Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Things to Do Transportation 	

Is this school for me? Probably not Maybe Definitely

MY TOP TEN SCHOOLS

Name of College _____

My Info

My GPA: _____
 My Class Rank: _____
 My ACT score: _____
 My SAT score: _____

General Info (from www.petersons.com)

Location: _____
 Enrollment: _____
 Mid-50% SAT combined: _____
 Mid-50% ACT: _____
 Tuition (In-State/Out-of-state): _____
 Entrance Difficulty: _____
 Website: _____

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(from www.collegeboard.com)

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Off-Campus Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Things to Do Transportation 	

Is this school for me? Probably not Maybe Definitely

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 My ACT score: _____
 My SAT score: _____

General Info (from www.petersons.com)

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 Enrollment: _____
 Mid-50% SAT combined: _____
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 Tuition (In-State/Out-of-state): _____
 Entrance Difficulty: _____
 Website: _____

Academic Info

(from www.collegeboard.com)

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Is this school for me? Probably not Maybe Definitely

MY TOP TEN SCHOOLS

Name of College _____

My Info

My GPA: _____

My Class Rank: _____

My ACT score: _____

My SAT score: _____

General Info (from www.petersons.com)

Location: _____

Enrollment: _____

Mid-50% SAT combined: _____

Mid-50% ACT: _____

Tuition (In-State/Out-of-state): _____

Entrance Difficulty: _____

Website: _____

Academic Info

(from www.collegeboard.com)

GPA:

3.75+ _____

3.5 – 3.74 _____

25.25- 3.49 _____

3.0 – 3.24 _____

2.5 – 2.99 _____

2.0 – 2.49 _____

1.0– 1.99 _____

below 1.0 _____

Class rank:

Top tenth _____

Top quarter _____

Top half _____

Bottom half _____

Bottom quarter _____

Academic match?

Safety (I'm likely to get in) Good match A reach?

Student Population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity General comfort level 	
Campus Facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dorms Dining Halls Rec Center Library 	
Academics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majors Faculty Studios/Labs 	
Campus Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extracurricular Activities Sports Fraternity/Sorority 	
Off-Campus Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Things to Do Transportation 	

Is this school for me? Probably not Maybe Definitely

MY TOP TEN SCHOOLS

Name of College _____

My Info

My GPA: _____
 My Class Rank: _____
 My ACT score: _____
 My SAT score: _____

General Info (from www.petersons.com)

Location: _____
 Enrollment: _____
 Mid-50% SAT combined: _____
 Mid-50% ACT: _____
 Tuition (In-State/Out-of-state): _____
 Entrance Difficulty: _____
 Website: _____

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