

Which kind of college is YOUR kind of college?

By **HEATHER RICKER-GILBERT**

There are more than 3,500 accredited colleges and universities in the United States. This means incredible diversity and opportunity available to students seeking a degree beyond high school.

But how do you differentiate among all of these schools? Most colleges have slick, glossy “viewbooks” and professionally developed websites to entice students to visit and apply.

But there are distinct categories that a prospective student should be aware of before deciding on what institution to attend.

As an independent college admissions counselor, I know it is important to understand the mission, culture and characteristics of the different types of schools you may be considering before you make your choice.

Make sure you understand these categories: land-grant universities, private research universities, baccalaureate and master’s degree institutions, community colleges, liberal arts colleges and specialized colleges.

Land-grant universities

Every state (ours is the University of Connecticut) has a land-grant university

founded in the mid-1800s to educate “the sons and daughters of the working classes in agriculture and the mechanical arts.”

Today these institutions have well-established engineering and agriculture colleges, as well as strong liberal arts and science programs.

As doctoral-granting institutions, land-grant universities (sometimes called flagships) offer a variety of majors, lots of school spirit with Division I sports teams, extensive libraries, large lecture classes and a wide range of faculty who are experts in particular fields of research.

Students who attend a big

state university need to be self-motivated and assertive if they are going to navigate the bureaucracy. This goes for universities ranging in size from 10,000 students (University of Vermont) to 21,000 students (Virginia Tech) to 35,000 (Michigan State.)

In addition to their land-grant university, many states support other public research universities – examples are the University of Virginia, the University of Michigan and Indiana University.

Private research universities

With state-supported universities, private research universities make up the approxi-

mately 260 doctoral-granting research universities in the United States.

Private research universities have well-known graduate and professional schools in addition to offering undergraduate majors.

For example, Tufts University has a dental school, a veterinary science school and a medical school. Duke University, the University of Rochester, the University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins University, Yale University and the University of Pennsylvania are private research institutions

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that offer undergraduates an array of majors and the possibility of research opportunities. Students considering a private research institution should be aware that these are very selective. They are interested in students who are intellectually curious and seek an academic challenge. Many are located in cities; students can participate in on-campus and off-campus cultural events.

General baccalaureate colleges and master's degree universities

Quinnipiac University, San Francisco State University, West Chester State University, Southern Connecticut State University, Endicott College, the University of New Haven and the University of Hartford are among the institutions that fall into this category.

General baccalaureate colleges can be either public or private. All of them offer the liberal arts, but they usually award more than half of their degrees in career-oriented or applied majors such as communications, nursing, computer technology, business and education.

Their focus is on undergraduate education, but they offer master's degrees in many areas.

General baccalaureate colleges are regional, and offer a comprehensive education with sports and extra-curricular activities. They are usually not as selective as research universities and some liberal arts colleges.

Community colleges

These schools, founded during the 1960s, were designed to be non-residential with open admissions. Today there is a public-supported community college within 90 miles of every person in the United States. They offer two-year associate degree

programs in applied areas such as hotel and restaurant management, graphic design, criminal justice, accounting and dental hygiene.

In addition, for the student who is undecided about a major, or who wants to fulfill general education requirements before transferring to a four-year college, community colleges are an economical place to begin a college career. In Connecticut, the annual full-time tuition at a community college is under \$3,000..

Liberal arts colleges

These focus on undergraduate education and offer courses in the humanities, social sciences, liberal arts and sciences. They do not offer career-

oriented or applied majors, although some may offer a business curriculum.

The majority of liberal arts colleges are private and range in size from 1,200 to 2,500 students.

Students who like small class discussions, who want to be involved in lots of activities, who want to play Division III sports, and who are looking for a strong sense of community may thrive at liberal arts colleges such as Kenyon, Union, Amherst, Dickinson, Colby, Trinity or Connecticut College.

Specialized private colleges

For students who are focused and sure about their career goals, there are highly

specialized schools in art, business, engineering and music.

For example, while a violin player could go to a comprehensive institution with an exceptional music program, such as Duquesne University or Northwestern, he/she may want to just concentrate on his or her music and attend a conservatory such as the Berklee School of Music or Julliard.

The aspiring business executive or entrepreneur may want to choose Babson College, or Bryant or Bentley, where the primary focus is on business. Engineers may want to attend the Colorado School of Mines or Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and the visual arts major may want to earn a fine arts degree at the Rhode Island School of Design or the Lyme Academy/College of Fine

Arts.

Specialized schools train students for a profession and have few general education requirements.

We are fortunate in this country to have many choices for higher education. In order to make an informed decision about where to apply and how to find the right "fit," the basic starting point is determining the type of institution where you will thrive, learn and develop your skills and talents.

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