

**Watson
College
Counseling**



Calming the journey to college



Building Your College List

Leslie Watson, Ph.D.

Watson College Counseling

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Calming the journey to college

“

*The journey is essential
to the dream.*

”

— St. Francis of Assisi

Building Your College List: The 4 Ps

Creating a college list requires understanding how the 4 Ps apply to you, the student:



Today, we are going to work through each of these factors, and I will provide you with tools to help you in your search.

Program

Among the adults present, who can say you are...

- Doing the exact job you imagined you'd be doing in adulthood, back when you were 18?
- Working in the exact field in which you majored during your undergraduate degree?
- Doing something for work you never imagined during your late adolescence?

College is a time for exploration –
“The Journey”

Choose a major, or apply to an exploratory program

Current Labor Indicators by Major

Major (by Median Early Career Wage)	Unemp. Rate	Underemp. Rate	Median Wage Early Career	Median Wage Mid-Career	Grad Degree %
Computer Engineering	7.8%	15.8%	\$90,000	\$131,000	39.4%
Computer Science	7.0%	19.1%	\$87,000	\$120,000	32.7%
Aerospace Engineering	2.2%	14.7%	\$85,000	\$130,000	45.5%
Chemical Engineering	4.7%	17.9%	\$85,000	\$135,000	48.1%
Industrial Engineering	4.2%	31.7%	\$83,000	\$100,000	40.6%
Electrical Engineering	3.2%	21.1%	\$82,000	\$123,000	47.7%
Mechanical Engineering	4.4%	20.1%	\$80,000	\$120,000	39.1%
General Engineering	4.5%	31.1%	\$75,000	\$105,000	37.1%
Civil Engineering	2.3%	15.6%	\$75,000	\$115,000	37.1%
Miscellaneous Engineering	3.7%	26.4%	\$75,000	\$105,000	46.3%
Construction Services	2.2%	17.9%	\$75,000	\$120,000	12.2%
Economics	3.5%	33.1%	\$72,000	\$115,000	41.6%
Business Analytics	5.0%	28.7%	\$72,000	\$109,000	26.7%
Mathematics	5.8%	26.2%	\$70,000	\$100,000	51.3%
Nursing	2.1%	12.8%	\$70,000	\$87,000	30.3%
Finance	2.8%	27.8%	\$70,000	\$112,000	31.5%
Accounting	2.6%	21.2%	\$68,000	\$97,000	33.7%
Information Systems & Management	6.0%	25.6%	\$67,000	\$100,000	27.9%

Source: Fed. Reserve Bank of NY, [Labor Market for Recent College Graduates](#), Feb. 2026 | Watson College Counseling | Calming the journey to college

Program: Finding Your Major

- In college, through an exploratory program with expert guidance
- Personality and aptitude assessments that lead to college major/career suggestions
- Free resources on the internet, such as:

[CareerOneStop](#)

[What Can I Do With A Major In...](#)

[U.S. News and World Report College Major Quiz](#)

[College Board: Big Future Career Quiz](#)

Program: Building Your List

- When you have an idea of the major(s) you're interested in, use tools to find who offers that major
- I do not recommend using AI to generate a college list
 - Popularity of a school creates bias — your list won't include colleges you might not have heard of (RPI, Rose Hulman for example)
[The Visibility Cliff: How AI Prestige Bias is Erasing Small Colleges from the Admissions Conversation](#)
 - Exception: Exploratory programs — AI is a good place to start

Program: College Navigator as Starting Point

- [College Navigator](#): unbiased, doesn't sell your data, numbers-based starting point to find colleges that meet your criteria
- Then, use AI to summarize programs offered by those schools (more on this later!)

Now you have a list of colleges — time to move to Price

Price

Now that you've found some programs, it's time to determine the potential cost.

- First, determine your budget and discuss it as a family
 - FAFSA — gives most students access to \$5,500 in federal student loans
 - 100% demonstrated need schools (highly selective; require CSS Profile)
- Every college must provide a Net Price Calculator
 - Takes time — go directly through the college's Financial Aid website ([here is an example](#))
- [Niche True Cost Calculator](#) — shortcut built on millions of data points
 - Don't eliminate colleges based on the Niche estimate alone!
 - Niche can help with list building, but it's not always objective

Place

How far?

How big?

Mountains? Water? Warm?

*Be realistic — anticipate
your future self*

People

- Who do you want to go to school with?
 - What sort of academic orientation? Cutthroat? Collaborative?
 - Are you okay being average?
 - International population?
 - Liberal? Conservative?
 - Economically diverse?
- How do faculty members interact with students?
 - Access to professors?
 - Is mentorship important?

Resources

- [The Fiske Guide](#)
- [Niche](#) (read about students)
- [Unigo](#)

VISIT!!!

Reputation and the Problem with Rankings

- "Fit" is about the items we've discussed — Program, Price, Place, and People
- Most employers don't care where you graduated from
- *HOW* you go to college matters more than where
- [Dream School](#) by Jeff Selingo
 - He also has a list of "[Buyers and Sellers](#)"
 - Buyers offer great education at a cost significantly less than "Seller" colleges — and may be more accessible

Using AI to Compare Colleges

*Now that you've found some colleges based on the 4 Ps, incorporate them into a prompt**

"After this prompt I will give you a list of colleges. Provide a table comparing each college's business major offerings, any special programs for business majors, information about internship/employment support, and global business study abroad opportunities. Tell me whether the business school leans toward a collaborative or a competitive environment. Include overall college test score ranges, % submitting SAT/ACT, average GPA, and whether the reported average GPA is weighted or unweighted. Tell me whether each college has a Greek system and a club soccer team. Finally, tell me what the Cost of Attendance for each college is and the average Net Price for families earning over \$100,000 per year. I have a 3.6 unweighted GPA, an SAT score of 1100, and live in Pennsylvania. Finally, how likely am I to be admitted?"

**...and use the results as a starting point for your research.*

The Ultimate Goal

Apply to 8–12 colleges, balanced across:

Likelies

High admission probability

Targets

Realistic match for your profile

Lotteries

Selective — but worth a shot

(Reach schools?)

Your counselor, Mr. Anater, can help you determine where each college falls on this spectrum.

If applying only to Likelies and Targets, 4–6 colleges is sufficient.



Presentation
and resources
can be found
by using your
camera on
this QR code

