



# HOW TO PICK A BEST-VALUE COLLEGE

MONEY's annual Best Colleges list ranks schools based on educational quality, affordability, and the career outcomes of their graduates. You can use similar criteria to identify the schools that will provide the best value for your particular student and financial situation. Use this checklist as a guide.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION

### START WITH GRADUATION RATES

Research shows that graduation rates are the single best indicator of a college's quality. Look for a six-year rate of no less than the median for similar schools: 48% at public colleges and 58% at private ones.

**Where to find it:** [Collegeresults.org](http://Collegeresults.org).

### COMPARE CLASS SIZES

Students who are mentored by a professor are 50% more likely to thrive in their careers. One indicator of personal attention is the percentage of classes with 20 or fewer students.

**Where to find it:** [Collegedata.com](http://Collegedata.com).

### LOOK BEYOND TEST SCORES

More important than average ACT or SAT scores is how well colleges help students with similar scores exceed expectations in school and later in life.

**Where to find it:** The MONEY College Planner ([money.com/colleges](http://money.com/colleges)). Look for a "Value Added" grade of at least B.

## AFFORDABILITY

### KNOW YOUR TRUE COST

Don't rely on the college's official cost of attendance, which few people actually pay. Instead, focus on its net price, after factoring in financial aid.

**Where to find it:** The net price calculator on the college's website. You can also compare several colleges at once at [CollegeAbacus.org](http://CollegeAbacus.org) or [money.com/collegetools](http://money.com/collegetools).

### BUDGET FOR A DEGREE, NOT A YEAR

Look beyond freshman year to calculate what each college would cost you from start to finish.

**Where to find it:** The MONEY College Planner shows the average net price of a degree at 700-plus colleges.

### MAXIMIZE MERIT AID

Your chances of a generous aid package will be best at colleges where your grades and test scores put you in the top 25% of applicants.

**Where to find it:** [Collegedata.com](http://Collegedata.com).

## STUDENT OUTCOMES

### CHECK GRADUATES' EARNINGS

The salaries of recent grads are a good indicator of how much employers value degrees from each school.

**Where to find it:** [PayScale.com](http://PayScale.com) and [Collegescorecard.ed.gov](http://Collegescorecard.ed.gov).

### EXPECT STRONG JOB-SEARCH HELP

An active career-services office will help students prepare résumés, practice for job interviews, and connect with influential alumni. The best colleges have at least one career-services staffer per 1,000 students.

**Where to find it:** Ask the college.

### INVESTIGATE INTERNSHIPS

Students with paid internships, studies show, are 70% more likely to get a job offer soon after graduation.

**Where to find it:** The career-services office. Find out what it does to help place students and ask what portion of internships—especially in your student's major—are paid.



## Where should my kid go to college?

Get the answers with the MONEY College Planner™.

Visit [money.com/colleges](http://money.com/colleges) to learn more.