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## The Journey of a Lifetime Begins Now

By [Barbara Kantrowitz](#) | Kaplan College Guide

Aug 12, 2009

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By the time you reach the point of applying to college, you may feel that you've heard way too much advice from your parents, your teachers, your guidance counselors, your neighbors—even that guy who graduated from your high school three years ago whom you ran into at the movies last week. Everyone, it seems, has an opinion about where you should apply, what you should study, and even what you should write in your essay. If you can stand it, here's one more piece of advice: forget everything you've heard, at least for a moment, and think about the most important person in this process: you. What do you want out of college?

It's a simple question with a very complicated answer. In fact, it's the theme of this 14th edition of the NEWSWEEK-Kaplan College Guide. Instead of focusing on different types of schools, we began by imagining different types of students and finding an environment that would work best for each one.

Veteran education reporter Jay Mathews has assembled a provocative list to get you started (page 12). Want to get as far away from home as possible? He suggests Goucher College in Maryland, the first college in the country to require overseas study for graduation. Hate the drunken parties? Check out Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif., a Churches of Christ-affiliated school that has been unusually successful in reducing underage alcohol abuse. If you have a fondness for tradition, you might find your bliss at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn., where some students wear academic robes to class.

**He's Got Some Great Advice For You: Relax Something Else to Worry About**  
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These are arbitrary (and, in some cases, fanciful) categories; there is no one single, absolutely perfect school for a particular student. Our goal is to help you narrow your choices by thinking about the kind of environment that works for you. Do you value diversity? Consider the makeup of the student body. Are you sports-obsessed? Look for a school with great teams. Are you a hard-core political animal? Think about an activist campus. Is green your thing? Check out schools that emphasize sustainability. Do you love theater? Ask about student productions. You'll learn best in an atmosphere that clicks with your individual interests, personality, and ambitions. And here's the take-a-deep-breath-and-relax part: there are literally dozens of schools where you can find what you need, and your chances of getting into at least one of them are much better than you think. We're here to help, using the journalistic expertise of NEWSWEEK reporters and editors and the educational resources of Kaplan Inc. (both owned by The Washington Post Company).

We've assembled an all-star team, starting with Douglas Bennett, president of Earlham College (page 8), who strikes what we hope is another calming note, pointing out that despite all the scary stats you hear about how hard it is to get into certain colleges, "there

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is very little evidence that these highly selective colleges provide a more effective education to the students who do gain admission than these same students would have received elsewhere." In other words, education is not a product that you can buy; it's a participatory experience, and you get out of it as much as you put into it. Students who plunge in and take advantage of what their particular schools have to offer will get a good education almost anywhere they go. And indifferent students will get an indifferent education. It's up to you.


Finding the right school and getting in is only the first step, of course. This year, paying the bills is a huge hurdle for so many families who are feeling financial pressure in the most serious economic downturn since the 1930s. The cost of college can seem overwhelming—more than \$50,000 a year for the nation's most elite private institutions. Families aren't the only ones hurting. Endowments have lost billions and donations are down, which means private colleges—even super-wealthy Harvard—are suffering. Public universities aren't doing any better. Many states have been forced to slash higher-education appropriations, and universities have responded by cutting faculty, staff, and course offerings. But as NEWSWEEK correspondent Arian Campo-Flores explains (page 34), schools recognize that they need to help and they're offering more aid. That's especially important for smaller liberal-arts colleges that are in the greatest danger of losing top students to wealthier institutions. The Obama administration has also made paying for college a priority with a wide range of new initiatives, including additional grant money and more-generous tax credits.

In order to take advantage of these new choices, you have to understand how the financial-aid system works. Linda Stern's piece (page 38) on the nuts and bolts of the money side of college admissions takes families through the process step by step and explains how to get the biggest chunk of federal loans, grants, private loans, and work-study funds. She urges almost everyone to apply for some aid, so don't assume you're not eligible. As she explains, even families with six-figure incomes can qualify for aid from expensive schools. You can also negotiate with the financial-aid office over the first package you're offered. Stern says aid officers call April "haggle month" because so many parents come begging after the decisions are in.

But haggling isn't the only way to save money on the cost of college. Today, the Hollywood version of college—a verdant quad lined with ivy-covered buildings that you enter after graduating from high school—is just one experience among many. The current postsecondary landscape includes not only the traditional four-year public and private institutions, but also online universities and career schools. In fact, as Andy Rosen, chairman and CEO of Kaplan Inc., points out (page 10), fewer than 3 million of America's 17 million registered college students fit the classic profile of an 18- to 22-year-old enrolled full time in a four-year school. Forty percent of today's college students are part-timers, go to two-year schools, and are 25 or older. That means most are working while they go to school and, in many cases, can take advantage of their employer's tuition-reimbursement policies.

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**Begley: Amazing Tool Use by Crows in New Video | Newsweek Voices - Sharon Begley**  
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