



Finding a 'Fit' College

Four kinds of 'Fit'

1. Academic fit

You want a college/university that offers the majors and classes that interest you. If you don't know your major yet, are there plenty of offerings from which you could choose, either STEM or Humanities depending on your interests?

You want a school where the courses on offer match your learning style which will set you up to succeed. Small schools offer small classes taught by professors in seminar-style discussions. Larger schools usually offer lecture-format classes taught by teaching assistants with professors available only during office hours. Check out labs, innovation centers, etc.

Go beyond the classroom to look at study abroad, research, and experiential learning opportunities (such as internships).

Consider the worldview by which the professors will frame their instruction. Is this worldview one that will build upon (or at least not dismantle) the biblical worldview that has been foundational to your learning at The Oaks?

2. Cultural fit

Consider size, demographics, location, weather (yes, it can matter), dorms, services, campus speakers, events, and extracurricular activities. All these factors should produce a level of comfort, the feeling that "I could see myself here."

Don't assume that a school that markets itself as a "Christian" college will deliver what you consider a Christian education. Here are some questions to consider: What are the three largest clubs on campus? What Christian organizations exist and are they allowed to meet on campus? What churches in the vicinity would be a fit for you? To what extent will your faith be allowed to flourish on campus, or will it be vilified?

3. Financial fit

Can I afford to attend this school without mountains of student debt? Consider four-year graduation rate, merit-aid scholarship amounts, level of institutional grants given, percentage of need met, and attentiveness of the financial aid department.

4. Career fit

What does this college do to prepare me for a vocation after graduation? Consider resume help, career counseling, career fairs, networking events, and percentage of graduates finding jobs six months after graduation.

5. Spiritual fit

- Will this college/university undergird the spiritual values our family has endeavored to instill into our student, or will it undermine our efforts?
- Will this college/university support my student's specific spiritual goals and needs? Is there adequate support for my student's spiritual growth (churches, Christian fellowship)?
- If this college/university is secular, will it respect my student's Christian worldview and faith positions, rather than demean or ridicule them?

Factors in a college that makes a long-term, positive impact on a student:

1. Tends to promote community; offers lots of gatherings (preferably small)
2. Tends to gather students in physical locations that are often cramped; student meet face to face with each other and with faculty, which builds strong connections.
3. Tends to organize activities where students can observe each other closely. Students feel known and accounted for.
4. Tends to organize retreats or authentic time together (sometimes under duress, e.g. military academies).
5. Tends to have a set of rituals that underscore their culture. They have a shared origins story and deeply rooted traditions.
6. Tends to have long-standing shared goals.
7. Every college's purpose is to transform you. Do you agree with the direction of their desired transformation? (sometimes found in their mission statement).
8. There is a personalization aspect to the college. You are viewed as a person, not a statistic, data point, or student ID number.

Six college experiences that lead to engagement:

1. Taking a course with a professor who makes learning exciting.
2. Working with professors who care about students personally.
3. Finding a mentor who encourages students to pursue personal goals.
4. Working on a project across several semesters.
5. Participating in an internship that applies classroom learning.
6. Being active in extracurricular activities.