

How to Choose a College

College or University?

The distinction between a college and a university makes little difference for undergraduates. Look for an institution known for teaching excellence, rather than research (where graduate students and other inexperienced “adjuncts” may teach as frequently as faculty). The reverse is approximately true when you wish to complete an advanced degree. Ideally, at all levels of higher education, you should study under faculty who are both skilled teachers and authors of important publications. Major universities traditionally have offered undergraduates more resources for research, but in recent years many colleges have offered equivalent opportunities.

Bible College or Christian Liberal Arts College?

If you wish to attend a Christian college, you may select either a Bible college, devoted to biblical literacy, or a Christian liberal arts college, which aims at comprehensive learning from a Christian perspective. Either a liberal or conservative Christian college may identify itself as a liberal arts college in the classic sense of “liberal” — liberating the mind from ignorance in every branch of education, including disciplines roughly divided into the “arts” and the “sciences.”

What Makes a Liberal Arts College or University “Christian”?

Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and most other early colleges in America began as liberal arts colleges devoted to exalting Jesus Christ in every discipline of knowledge. Virtually none of these early institutions have a substantial Christian identity today. Various Christian groups have founded subsequent institutions of higher education, but many of these have departed, to one degree or another, from a rigorous commitment to a publicly defensible and biblically adequate Christian worldview. Ask questions about Christian identity beginning with these sample questions:

- Do all of your professors believe in biblical inerrancy as defined by the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (<http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI.shtml>)? If not, then what adherence to biblical authority is required of faculty?
- Would you fire a professor who ceased to believe in the historic doctrines of Christianity?
- Do your professors believe in the historical reality of sin entering the human race through human disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden? Or, do some faculty believe in a form of evolutionary theory that would explain sin as the result of a natural competitive process (natural selection) that God allegedly used to bring humans into existence?
- Do any science faculty think that evolution fails to explain the origin of major life forms? Unsatisfactory answers might suggest that a secular university would be a better pick. You would expect, and resist better, theological error and naturalistic bias from non-Christians.

What Should I Observe During a Campus Visit?

- At a Christian college look for authentic worship in chapel and ask a professor questions such as those above, looking for agitated body language or condescending facial expressions.
- At a secular institution notice harmful social environments and policies that limit free speech.
- Is this a place where you could flourish as a student, or is it chiefly a “party” school?
- Could you complete a degree here without going into excessive debt? What is the real cost of education in this setting? Dig deeper than attractive college websites and brochures.