

To return to the article, [click here](#).

## College Choices

By Elaina Loveland  
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### Parents and students should team up when it comes to picking which college a student should attend.

This fall, high school seniors will be faced with one of the biggest decisions of their lives: choosing a college. Higher education is almost a prerequisite for living in America today, and the process of choosing a college has never been more important — or more confusing.

Joe A. Howell, author of *Selecting the Right College: A Family Affair*, emphasizes that the search for the right college should be a partnership between the parent and child.

"Although the years of selecting the right college through graduation are few, their results impact the family, especially the child, disproportionately than any other comparable years," says Howell. "To select the right college takes a unified effort by all concerned."

The best college decisions are made when parents and their children work together in the college search process. Just ask Danae Kehoe, an attorney from Falls Church, Va.; her son, Eric Martin, graduated from a prestigious college preparatory magnet school this past June.

"Trust your child's instincts," says Kehoe. "My son knew what he wanted, even though he had trouble ... explaining it to me."

Throughout the college search, Kehoe was involved in the process, trying to find out as much as possible about the colleges that might interest Eric. She wanted what was best for him, and along the way it led to some miscommunication.

"All our rough spots were because I didn't trust that [Eric knew] which schools interested him," she says. "By the end of the process, when he'd chosen the school he [would] attend, it was obvious he had known from the very beginning. We would have saved ourselves a lot of angst if I'd simply believed him."

### Students and the military

Besides forming a partnership with their parents, students from military families have a different set of circumstances from civilian families during the college search. Many military dependents have a more diverse set of life experiences because they have lived in many geographic locations, which can make them stand out among other students — a clear advantage in the

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### College Search Tips

#### SIDEBAR:

- Students should take an active role in their own college search; parents should trust a student's instincts.
- Make sure the school has the right educational offerings.
- Make sure the campus environment is a good fit for the student.
- Consider how much the family can afford, but initially investigate all options — no matter the cost — discussing financing when it is time to make

college admissions process.

However, former Army 1st Lt. Ken Hartman, former director of admissions and guidance services for The College Board and current director of Academic Affairs for Drexel University's Drexel eLearning, says this advantage sometimes can be a disadvantage. "Many military dependents have relocated multiple times to multiple locations around the country and world and consequently [they] might [have] difficulty in finding counselors [or] teachers familiar enough with them to write a letter of recommendation or to suggest the right college," he says.

Military dependents living with their families overseas during their junior or senior years of high school can have an even more difficult time than other students. "These students may have difficulty visiting colleges in the States, and must rely entirely on other's opinions and the Internet to make college decisions," Hartman says.

But if parents and students are proactive about learning which Internet sites are helpful and which are not, it can make the college search easier. Today, technology is on the side of both parents and students because nearly every college has everything prospective students need to know on their Web sites.

### **A broad search**

Among the thousands of higher education institutions in the United States, each school has different educational offerings. Perhaps the first thing parents and teens should consider is whether the college offers a degree that matches the college-bound student's area of interest.

Martin, now a freshman at Cornell University in New York, recommends that students do their own research. "Read the view books and look at the Web sites and read the books that describe the school," he says. "They'll tell you a lot about the programs and culture of a school — and it will let you save yourself from running around the country looking at a whole lot of schools you'll wind up not liking."

Also, parents and students should take care to investigate not only the reputation of the colleges, but also the reputation of the department in which the student wants to study. After all, most of the student's academic experiences will be with that department; the program should be highly regarded — if possible, even more so than the overall reputation of the college.

### **Campus Culture**

You could consider the campus environment and location to narrow the list of college options before embarking on a campus tour. Once you've decided on a short list of institutions to consider, arrange campus visits.

the final decision.

### **eNews You Can Use**

**SIDEBAR:**  
Former Army 1st Lt. Ken Hartman has a free e-newsletter for parents of college-bound students. Visit his [Web site](#), for more information.

When visiting the college, both parents and teens should take in the campus environment. Is there Greek life on campus? Are sports a big part of the campus culture? Is there an arts scene with performing groups or visiting artists? Each student has different interests, and matching them with what's available in terms of nonacademic activities is important.

Whether a college is close to home or located in an urban, suburban, or rural area will give the campus its own unique flavor. Hartman says that because the military culture and lifestyle, as a rule, are very structured and nurturing, "military families should talk about the type of culture best suited for their child."

Gretchen Guisbert agrees. She is married to Maj. Ed Guisbert, USA-Ret., and has two daughters in college — Stephanie, 18, a freshman at the University of Michigan, and Kelsey, 21, a senior at Hope College in Michigan. "Visit the colleges to make sure the school is the right fit for your child," she says. "For example, a private liberal arts college like Hope College was perfect for my daughter Kelsey, but it wouldn't have been the right environment for my daughter Stephanie."

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