

PARENT TEACHING TIPS

... on Choosing the right College

By Bill Welker, EdD

Before I give advice for choosing a college, I have one caveat to mention. You must understand that not all students want or need a college education. As a matter of fact, many students have chosen to attend technical schools and apprentice programs. A smart move for them because there is always a need for plumbers, electricians, bricklayers, pipefitters, carpenters, coalminers, roofers, truckers, computer technicians, etc. And they make very good salaries. Please keep these alternatives in mind as I give my suggestions for choosing the right college.

If your child is a junior or senior in high school and plans to attend college, but hasn't decided where, he or she has to determine which institution of higher learning is best suited for him or her. This is, of course, the most important decision he or she has to make upon high school graduation. The following questions should be asked before any aspiring collegian makes a decision. Have your child read it carefully

** Does the college offer the exact curriculum I wish to take?*

High school students often are so fascinated with the superficial aspects of a college that they forget why they are planning to further their education. If you are going to become a mechanical engineer, then you should be mainly concerned about that department. For example, are the professors well-respected, and is the program highly regarded by academic circles not directly associated with the school?

** What scholarships are available at the college I am interested in attending?*

It is important that you look into every possible grant and scholarship the school has to offer. Your guidance counselor can assist you in this area. Believe it or not, many scholarships are unused each year because students aren't aware of their existence.

Likewise, don't forget to look into work-study programs and athletic scholarships for which you might qualify. It's worth a shot. Be smart; check out every scholarship avenue available.

** Can I afford the college?*

If you have limited financial resources, you must be realistic about choosing a college you can afford. Of course, you can work your way through college. But when you are devoting more time to working than studying, you are depriving yourself of the total higher education experience.

Remember, a highly-respected college degree does not necessarily have to come from Harvard or Yale. It's what you put into your degree program and, more importantly, what you make of it on the job.

** What have past graduates accomplished at the college?*

You want to attend a school that has consistently produced quality individuals. You should have no problem finding out this information. Most colleges are more than pleased to show off the "success stories" of former students. Naturally, the most direct approach would be to talk to a graduate of the school if possible.

Gleaning information from all these sources should help you in your final decision.

** Do I want to attend a college far away?*

This is an important question. If you are going to spend your time being homesick, you certainly will have problems concentrating on your studies. Let's face it; leaving a girlfriend or boyfriend back home is a difficult decision to make at any age. Be certain you are ready to take should a step, so you're not coming back home three weeks after school begins. If you drop out once, it's easier to do so the next time around. Thus, be sure you can make the move.

** Is the environment of the college conducive to your basic nature?*

You have to feel comfortable in the educational setting of your choosing. The natural surroundings of the school should be to your liking. It should possess a social climate that would be acceptable to you. If you participate in extracurricular activities, does the school offer clubs and/or athletic programs suitable to your interests? You should also check into the health care services, especially if you have some medical conditions. These and other personal concerns must be addressed before you make your college choice.

** How effective is the college's job placement office?*

When graduating from college, you want to feel confident that the school's placement office will aid you in finding a well-paying, secure position. This you can determine before matriculating at an institution of higher learning by visiting the placement office and asking pertinent "employment-after-graduation" questions. Of course, your main concern would be the placement of graduates in your major field of endeavor.

Proper professional placement after graduation from college is important for beginning on the right foot when initiating a lifelong career. So don't forget to check out the school's placement office when you and your parents visit the institution.

You, the student, must make the final decision, and such a decision involves answering the above questions to your satisfaction. Your parents, teachers, coaches, and guidance counselors can be of great assistance in your choice, but it is you who must live with it.

Parent Proverb

“There is no place where success comes before work, except in the dictionary.”

- Donald Kimball

Next Month's Column: “Appropriate Reading Speeds”

(Editor's Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He is a former “Teacher of the Year” recipient awarded by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. His e-mail is mattalkwv@hotmail.com.)