

# Freshmen: Busted—The Top Myths About College

## **Myth #1 - It's better to get good grades than take challenging courses.**

When you have even some success in advanced or accelerated courses, it indicates to a college that you can handle challenging courses – like those you will find in college. A challenging college preparatory program or some advanced placement courses will help you succeed in college.

## **Myth #2 - The standardized tests (ACT, PSAT, & SAT) are more important than your high school grades.**

Colleges know that your performance in high school is a better predictor of college success than the standardized tests. That does not mean that most colleges will ignore your test scores. Some state institutions with large numbers of applicants may use scores to determine if you are eligible.

## **Myth #3 - I need to decide on my career before I can choose a college.**

College is your time to explore. Except in a few specific situations, you can choose a major in your sophomore year and still complete your degree in four years. A surprising number of students discover their ideal field while taking a course they didn't expect to like. If you're not ready, choose a college that allows you to keep your options open. Take your time.

**Myth #4 - If I haven't heard of a college or university, it can't be very good.** You may not hear about many of the nation's finest colleges until you are well into your adult life. Athletics on television is how most colleges get to be known, but many great colleges do not get that kind of exposure. Some of the nation's finest colleges don't play big-time athletics. Judge a college on its own merits, not on name recognition.

## **Myth #5 - A lot of out-of-class activities will make up for poor grades.**

Yes, colleges consider out-of-class activities such as athletics, student government, and music when they review an application. But colleges look at your academic performance first. Lots of out-of-class activities help only if the college already believes you can do the work.

## **Myth #6 - You should go to the most prestigious college that admits you.**

Actually, you should go to the college that "fits" you best. If it happens to be prestigious, that's fine. However, fit has to do with how you feel when you are on campus, that matches with how you learn and how the professors teach, along with the academic pressure you can handle. If the college isn't a good match, you will be unhappy regardless of the prestige.

**Myth #7 - Big colleges are best if you haven't decided on a major field.**

Many students think that because there are more courses to choose from, a large college offers greater options for undecided students. If you are undecided, the best college is one that has core requirements or distribution requirements that ensure you will explore new areas and fields.

Also, look for colleges with the strongest academic advising and career counseling programs regardless of their size. Good advising can help you choose an academic and career path you will enjoy rather than one you think you might like right now.

**Myth #8 - The quality of the academic program in which I am interested is the most important characteristic of a college.**

About two of five students change their major fields of interest before they actually enroll in college, and about one of two changes the major field once enrolled. Look for a college that has your current field of interest but is also strong in all its areas.

It's worth noting that the research on success in graduate school and in employment after college suggests that the best way to master a major field is a combination of learning theory and active, hands-on-learning by doing. What's more valuable is having the opportunity to do research on your own or to work side by side with a professor on a project rather than simply taking more courses in the field.

**Myth #9 - The best time to visit colleges is after you have been admitted.**

Many students have fallen for this myth only to find that none of the colleges to which they were admitted "felt" right when they visited. If possible, visit before you apply and again after you have been admitted. If you can visit only once, make it before you apply.

**Myth #10 - College is for only four years.**

This is wrong on two fronts: 1) You can't trade in your degree for another one if you didn't go to the best college for you the first time. Your college is with you for life. 2) Only about one of five students completes college in four years. In fact, only two of five students complete college in six years. If you plan to be out of college in four years, learn what each college's four-year graduation rate is.

**Myth #11 - Your life will be ruined if you don't get admitted to your first-choice college.**

Thousands of students each year do not get admitted to their first choice college, and most are happy, healthy individuals today. Yes, rejection is hard on your ego, but you will not be alone. Additionally, the vast majority of students who settle for their second choice and end up happy at that institution.

**Myth #12 - You have to take only the minimum college prep courses to get into college.**

Technically, this is true. In reality, it is not. The more mathematics, science, and languages you take, the better your chances are for getting into a good four-year college, and the better your chances of success once you get there.

**Myth #13 - You will have a better chance of getting into professional or graduate school if you go to a university that offers these graduate programs.**

Many students and parents mistakenly think that attending a university with a law school, medical school, or graduate school guarantees admissions into that program at graduation. Very few universities give their students special preference for graduate study, and those that do reserve it for only the very best students. Many small colleges and universities have excellent records in placing students in professional schools and graduate programs. The key to admission is succeeding in a strong major program at a challenging college, not where you go. Regardless of where you attend, there are no guarantees.

**Myth #14 - Colleges are concerned only with my intellectual and academic development.**

Many colleges and smaller universities pride themselves on their ability to "develop the whole person." Some of this personal development comes from requiring a broad-based general education that contributes to your understanding of the world and our society. Plus, personal growth takes place in the residence halls where you learn things like tolerance and how to get along with different kinds of people.

**Myth #15 - Only the very best students receive financial aid from colleges.**

If you are admitted and have financial need, colleges generally want to make it possible for you to attend. In fact, the greatest proportion of financial assistance at private colleges tends to go to students in the middle of the class. High-ability students, or students with special talents, may receive "merit-based scholarships."

**Myth #16 - The federal government provides most of the financial aid.**

Government grants comprise only a moderate proportion of the financial aid available. In fact, the government continually reduces the amount of grant money – money that does not need to be paid back. Private colleges, especially, supply the largest portion of financial aid.

**Myth #17 - Even if I get financial aid, I will end up with large loans to repay when I graduate.**

To see that you don't have too much debt at graduation, most colleges allow you to borrow only a reasonable amount. Nationally, on average, students will usually have only \$2,500-\$3,500 per year in loans. At most private colleges, this represents less than 20 percent of the annual charges. Depending on the loan, you will usually have 10 years to repay, and you don't start the repayment until after you graduate.

**Myth #22 - You can't trust the college about financial aid.**

Financial aid is not a "you vs. me" business. The job of a college's financial aid officer is to make it possible for all admitted students to attend their college while staying within the federal guidelines.

**Get the Truth:**

Busted—The Top Myths about Financial Aid

Myths are from: <http://www.knowhow2go.org/index.php?categoryid=87>

# Please Answer the Following Questions in complete sentences

- 1.) Will colleges look only at your grades when they choose to accept you for their institution?
- 2.) How do most big time colleges get to be well known?
- 3.) True or false; the finest colleges are only the ones that have big time athletics. If false please explain why.
- 4.) Should you select a college based on how prestigious it is or should you select a college if it fits you? Please explain your answer.
- 5.) When should you visit a college or university?
- 6.) Do you have to finish college in exactly four years? Explain.
- 7.) Where does the greatest portion of financial assistance at private colleges go to?
- 8.) If you are awarded a grant what portion of it will you have to pay back?
- 9.) If you chose to take out loans to help you pay for college how long will you have to pay them back?
- 10.) When do you begin to pay back the loans?