



## Which College Review Publications are Credible?

...Where should I start?

If you are about to help your student embark on a search for colleges to which they might apply, you are probably wondering where to start. There are dozens of publications that rank and/or describe colleges. Here are a few tips to help you get started.

- Each guide has a different perspective. For example, one may be from the point of view of alumni and have a positive slant for every write-up. Another may be from the point of view of an educational institute and promote certain core values and curricula.
- To get an idea of which guides are likely to be the most helpful to you, read the introductions plus a couple of essays from each of several different books. Compare and contrast the types of information provided, and note the tone and perspective of each.
- Take advantage of the collection of guides at the Fairview Post-Grad Center. You may check out a guide overnight or peruse several guides during a brief visit to the Center. This is an excellent chance to try before you buy. Guides are also readily available by ordering them through your local bookstore.
- Be cautious in relying on college rankings such as the ones by *U.S. News and World Report*, *Princeton Review* and *Newsweek*. There are so many good colleges, and there are many excellent matches for any given student, but many fine colleges do not show up in the "top 100" sorts of rankings. You can, however, use the rankings lists to get some names of colleges on which to do more research.
- Know that some of the guides that rank colleges accept payment from colleges that want to be included in the guides. Another difficulty is that these guides often do not have an objective set of criteria for ranking the colleges.
- Be cautious in relying on estimated college costs, especially when they are shown as a range. Check another source, such as the Kiplinger.com web site, to get another estimate.

Some of the guides that are **most recommended** at Fairview are as follows:

### **ISI's Choosing the Right College – The Whole Truth About America's Top Schools**

The staff of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) produces this publication. ISI supports efforts to strengthen liberal arts curricula at colleges and universities, and the book criticizes many highly selective schools for political correctness and failure to maintain standards. The guide includes:

- In-depth essays on 125 elite institutions and lesser-known schools with outstanding programs.
- Reports on campus politics and intellectual diversity
- Advice on which departments, professors and courses to seek out.
- Guidance on how to build your own core curriculum at each school.
- Inside information on campus life.
- How to ask the right questions during campus visits.
- Vital statistics for each college, including number of students, costs, percentage of applicants who are accepted, and the percentage of students who graduate in 4 years and in 6 years.

### **Fiske Guide to Colleges**

Edward B. Fiske, the former Education Editor of *The New York Times*, writes this guide along with Robert Logue and the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* staff. The guide features:

- Essays on approximately 300 colleges and universities.
- Information has been supplied via questionnaires filled out by the institutions and by students. Questions for students covered topics ranging from the accessibility of professors and the quality of housing and dining facilities to the type of nightlife and weekend

entertainment available. At the beginning of each write-up are basic statistics about the institution.

- **Best Buys**

The Best Buy graphic next to a college name denotes institutions that offer remarkable educational opportunities at a relatively modest cost. Use caution in relying on the Best Buy designations. Costs are shown as a range, indicated by from one to four dollar signs for private & for public schools, with a key at the front of the book. The estimated costs do not always seem to match up well with costs as shown at the Kiplinger.com web site.

### **The Fiske Guide to Getting into the Right College**

Edward B. Fiske and Bruce G. Hammond write this pragmatic and readable guide to the universe of colleges. It features sections on:

- How to choose the right college for you
- Secrets from admissions officers: how do they really rank applicants?
- How to write winning essays
- How to get off a waiting list and get accepted
- Financial aid information and timelines
- How to get the most financial aid
- How to use the Internet to get into college
- Strategies for applying and interviewing

### **Templeton Guide – Colleges That Encourage Character Development**

The John Templeton Foundation edits this publication. This book includes many small-to-medium enrollment colleges and at least one that enrolls 25,000 students. It includes:

- Part I – Exemplary Programs  
405 college programs in 10 categories designed to encourage character development in higher education.
- Part II – Presidential Leadership  
50 college and university presidents who dedicate their time, talent and resources to character development as an essential aspect of the undergraduate experience.
- Part III – The Templeton Honor Roll  
100 colleges and universities that exhibit a strong campus-wide ethos that articulates the expectation of personal and civic responsibility in all dimensions of college life.

### **Barron's Guide to the Most Competitive Colleges**

The College Division Staff of Barron's Educational Series, Inc. edits this guide. Recent graduates have written the descriptions of campus environments and students' life.

- Profiles  
The third edition has essays on 65 schools whose inclusion was based on the standards of Barron's Selector Ratings in the *Profiles of American Colleges*. The selected schools are denoted as the most academically demanding in the U.S. Most of the colleges are private, with a small number of public colleges in the mix.
- Most Competitive Comparison  
This shows at a glance how each of the competitive schools stacks up against one another in areas such as acceptance numbers and test scores.
- College Summaries  
In addition to the detailed essays on each college, there is a short section at the back of the book that provides a thumbnail sketch of each.

**Colleges That Change Lives** (40 schools you should know about even if you're not a straight-A student)

Loren Pope, the director of the College Placement Bureau and author of *Looking Beyond the Ivy League*, is the author of this guide. He cites the importance of considering colleges that have fewer than 5,000 students. The emphasis is on choosing a college that enables the

student to have a close relationship with the teachers, and to be touched and changed by the experience of attending college. As he states in the "Lifetime Guarantee" introductory chapter,

"For the 70 years that records have been kept, many of these 40 (colleges) that welcome "B" and "C" as well as "A" students have produced higher percentages of scientists and scholars than the prestige schools that take only a fraction of the "A" students who apply."

"These schools share two essential elements: a familial sense of communal enterprise that gets students heavily involved in cooperative rather than competitive learning, and a faculty of scholars devoted to helping young people develop their powers, mentors who often become their valued friends."

### **100 Colleges Where Average Students Can Excel**

The author, Joe Ann Adler, states "The average student for whom I wrote this book can identify with one or more of the following criteria: a high school grade point average of between 2.0 and 2.9 on a scale of 4.0; a class rank between the 40<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> percentile; an SAT I score between 950 and 1050 or comparable ACT score."

This book includes:

- Brief essays (usually about 3 pages long) about each of 100 colleges. Most of the colleges listed have 3,000 or fewer students enrolled. The colleges are a mix of public and private institutions that are moderately selective, but judged to offer excellent opportunities.
- A guide to college costs in the back of the book.

As the book jacket advertises, "This... reference profiles quality schools renowned for their innovative teaching styles, unique curricula, small class sizes, extensive academic services and abundant on-campus housing – all the crucial factors that help average students succeed."

### **The Insider's Guide to the Colleges** – Students on Campus Tell You What You Really Want to Know

The staff of the *Yale Daily News* compiles and edits this guide to selective colleges. The Insider's Guide is written "by students, for students, using the experiences of students", as described in the Preface. It includes:

- Getting In - Introductory pages about getting into college and finding funds.
- The College Finder  
Lists designed to help you match your interests with a selected group of colleges. There are lists for small, medium and large student enrollments, for low, medium and high acceptance rates, for low, mid-range and high cost tuitions, schools with very high graduation rates and more.
- Essays about specific colleges, sorted alphabetically within state.
- A box of basic information prefaces each essay. It includes number of students, costs, percentage of applicants who are accepted, graduation rate and more. Essays are sprinkled with quotes from students.

### **Greene's Guides to Educational Planning: Making It Into a Top College** (10 Steps to Gaining Admission to Selective Colleges and Universities)

Howard Greene, M.A., M.Ed., and Matthew Greene, Ph.D., both of whom are renowned college placement consultants, wrote this guide. The guide includes:

- An inside look at how the admissions process works. This includes clear definitions of the different admissions methods, such as rolling admissions, early decision, early action and regular admissions.
- What the top colleges are looking for.
- Choosing the best college for you.
- Presenting your qualifications, work experience and references.
- Making the most of campus visits.

- Creative financing – taking advantage of all the options.

**Greene's Guides to Educational Planning: Inside the Top Colleges** (Realities of Life and Learning in America's Elite Colleges)

This is one of a series of guides written by the father and son team of Howard Greene, M.A., M.Ed., and Matthew Greene, Ph.D., renowned college placement consultants. The top colleges to which the title refers are 20 elite colleges that are some of the most-frequently-named and sought-after colleges, such as Harvard, Yale, Stanford and MIT.

A key theme in the book is reflected in the title of the introduction: Getting Past the Halo Effect. As the authors state, there is a false assumption that "admission to an elite school guarantees academic success, social happiness, access to the top graduate schools, and lifelong positions of leadership in any chosen endeavor." That is the halo effect. The book goes on to talk about getting past the myths, current campus issues, difficulties in attending an elite institution, differences in quality of life at the elite schools and how to find the right match for a student to a college.

**Harvard Schmarvard** – Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College That Is Best for You  
Jay Mathews, one of the country's best education writers, is the author of this very readable guide. This guide features:

- The top 100 outstanding (but under appreciated) colleges
- Insider secrets on writing essays and getting off the wait list
- The interview process, as seen through the eyes of an interviewer and alumnus.
- The truth about *U.S. News & World Report* and other college rankings
- A personal questionnaire to determine the right college fit for you (Appendix A)
- Helpful tips for financing a college education (part of Chapter 6)

Several of the colleges cited in this book also appear in Loren Pope's Colleges That Change Lives.

**The College Finder** – Choosing the School That's Right for You (More Than 1,000 Colleges Covered)

Steven Antonoff is the author of this guide. The following book review (by reviewer Wesley) appears on the Amazon web site.

"This helpful guide ranks American colleges and universities on a wide variety of dimensions: admissions, academics, quality, social, internationalism, careers, athletics, enrollment, and cost. This information can clearly help a college-bound student look for an academic setting that will meet her/his needs. For example, colleges with accessible faculty (e.g., Rice & Grinnell) would be perfect for students who like one-on-one attention. On the other hand, some students might be more interested in the top party schools (e.g., Tulane & Arizona State). Other lists are just fun, such as "College Towns with Excellent Pop Music Scenes" (e.g., Seattle & Austin).

However, one major debit exists; although some lists are clearly referenced (e.g., U.S. News's Best National Universities), others are attributed simply to "experts," without explication of the source. For example, the "Top Schools for Chemistry" doesn't clarify from whom or how the rankings were derived. Whether the rankings were solicited from college administrators or experts in the field of chemistry makes a big difference. In other words, I wouldn't simply rely on these listings to pick a school.

Overall, I'd recommend this book for students looking for the right college or university. However, it shouldn't be the primary book they use. Also add a basic college guide that includes stats about each school."