

How to build a realistic, balanced College List

During the summer of junior year is the ideal time to visit colleges and start building the college list. There are several important areas to focus and discuss while building a balanced, realistic college list:

- Student GPA and College Average incoming Freshmen GPA
- Student SAT/ACT score and College average incoming Freshmen SAT/ACT (if submitting)– want to try to be within at maximum 100 points of the incoming freshmen average to be competitive
- Tuition cost (in state vs out of state and maximum ceiling cost)
- Location (think of the transportation costs)
- Size of School
- Major area of interest

Each student will need to know his GPA and SAT score (if he has taken the test). The GPA and SAT score will help identify if schools are Dream, At-Level, or Likely.

To build a balanced list, each student should adhere to the 2-2-2 minimum theory: 2 Dream (Least Likely), 2 At-Level (Likely), and 2 Likely (Most Likely). There is no rhyme or reason to how college offer admission; however, all colleges focus on GPA and SAT scores (if submitted) as significant deciding factors.

2 Dream (Least Likely)

- Student GPA is **below** the school's incoming freshmen GPA average
- Student SAT/ACT score is **below** the school's incoming freshmen SAT/ACT average
- Tuition cost is **higher than the max ceiling** the family has discussed
- Location is **outside of desired distance or state**
- Size of school is **much larger than wanting**
- Major area of interest is **extremely competitive**

2 At-Level (Likely)

- Student GPA is **within the median** of the school's incoming freshmen GPA average
- Student SAT/ACT score is **within the median** of the school's incoming freshmen SAT/ACT average
- Tuition cost is **within the range** the family has discussed
- Location is **within the desired distance or state**
- Size of school is **within the size margin wanting**
- Major area of interest is competitive but possible to get into the program

2 Likely (Most Likely)

- Student GPA is above the school's incoming freshmen GPA average
- Student SAT/ACT Score is above the school's incoming freshmen SAT/ACT score
- Tuition cost is at or below the rang the family has discussed
- Location is within the desired distance or state
- Size of the school is within the size margin wanting
- Major area of interest is competitive but obtainable to get into the program.

** Typically, students will have 3-4 Dream schools, 3-4 At-Level Schools, and 3-4 Likely schools to compose a realistic, balanced list**

Hypothetical Student Sam

Student Sam's Stats:

GPA 3.76 / ranked 13/48 in class

SAT score 1180

Tuition Price aim around \$30,000 (will apply for scholarships, but not guaranteed),

Location wants a small-medium size school/wants to be 2-6 hours away from home (Home is Richmond, VA).

	GPA	SAT	TUITION	LOCATION	Dream, At-level, Likely
SAM	3.76	1180	~\$30,000	2-6 HOURS SMALL/MED. SIZE	
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA	4.00 (HIGHER)	1275 (HIGHER)	\$33,928 (HIGHER)	5.5 HOURS/35,470 enrolled – too large/far	DREAM (Least Likely)
VIRGINIA TECH	4.04 (HIGHER)	1235 (IN RANGE)	\$27,755 (IN RANGE)	3 HOURS/30,000 enrolled – within distance/ too large	DREAM (Least Likely)
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE	3.77 (IN RANGE)	1260 (IN RANGE)	\$36,090 (HIGHER)	3.5 HOURS/23,774 enrolled (within distance / maybe size)	AT LEVEL (Likely)
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY	3.65 (IN RANGE)	1215 (IN RANGE)	\$29,978 (SLIGHTLY BELOW)	2 HOURS/35,000 enrolled (within distance/maybe size)	AT LEVEL (Likely)
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY	3.34 (LOWER)	1098 (LOWER)	\$28,088 (LOWER)	2 HOURS/24,932 enrolled (within distance/maybe size)	LIKELY (Most Likely)
BRIDGEWATER COLLEGE	3.49 (LOWER)	1078 (LOWER)	\$37,720 (ABOVE)	2 HOURS / 1,552 enrolled (within distance/ small)	LIKELY (Most likely)