

## **COLLEGE FIT VS. RANK**

*by Rachel B. Sobel, Ph.D., College Consultant*  
from The Main Line Times – April 2008

Finally, you've made it. You're the big cheese on campus. A SENIOR. Ah....the glory.....the privileges.....the respect! You pull into the school parking lot on the first day of SENIOR YEAR amidst hugs, kisses, and body slams. It's so great to see everybody again. The sun is shining, music is blaring from car stereos as one friend after another pulls into the parking lot. THIS IS SO COOL!!! Laughing, chattering, planning for the party Friday night, catching up on summer gossip while walking into school, and BAM!!!!.....There it is! Posted on the front door! SENIORS – COLLEGE APPLICATIONS ARE DUE (blah, blah, blah...) You can't even read any further. You've thought about college intermittently over the summer, mostly when your parents nagged you about writing your essay, but here it is, in your face, and you haven't even started your first day of senior year of high school yet. This is going to be a long year – well, a long semester anyway.

The chit-chat and gossip of the morning has turned to college talk during lunch. "Where are you applying?" becomes the mantra of the week. The answer, you realize, becomes a secret guarded almost as well as the password to Fort Knox. You've known many of your fellow students for years and shared the most intimate secrets, but anything regarding "College" (with a capital "C") becomes off limits. Why?!?!? With the rising number of applicants for the same number of spots in the freshmen class, applying to college has become a contact sport.

In high school, all students must meet the same state requirements in order to graduate. Academic rigor, grades, extracurricular activities both in and outside of school, writing proficiency, and extenuating circumstances create the college application, thus the profile of the person who wants to attend college. Just because a student may be able to get into a college, doesn't mean that that is the college that is the best one for them, the best fit. Getting in is one thing. Staying in and being happy is quite another.

In the olden days of the 60s and 70s when college was a terminal degree, it used to be that getting into an Ivy League or Ivy Like college meant instant success. As parents we want nothing more than for our children to be happy and thrive academically and socially at college. Sometimes this happens at name brand schools and sometimes our children find this at little known gems that soon become name brand schools because we and they were brave enough to buck the trend and try something new if only to validate that one size does not fit all. Even at top-notch schools, differences abound. Specialty schools are rife with nuance where students choose to attend based on faculty, internships, research opportunities, and programming.

College ranking is only as good as the schools that participate in the surveys. Several prestigious colleges do not participate in these surveys which must be remembered when one is examining the outcomes of these reports. Listed below are several websites that are helpful in discussing college rank vs. fit:

<http://nnhscareercenter.home.comcast.net/FeaturePopups/From-Jay-Mathews.htm>

From Jay Mathews - Washington Post Staff Writer- from Tuesday, April 1, 2003

A great list of colleges and universities that "deserve bigger reputations . . . the hidden gems . . . the lesser known jewels . . . the wallflower colleges that students fall in love with only after they get to know them . . . the colleges that their graduates rave about."

<http://www.ctcl.com/>

When acclaimed education writer [Loren Pope](#) first set out to share with students, families, and counselors his thoughts about colleges, his goal was to provide insights that would allow people to make more informed choices. Too often college choices are made based on false misinformation, or a lack of information—and these uninformed choices have led to higher dropout, transfer, and failure rates in higher education. After much research, Mr. Pope began championing a small group of less well-known colleges for their life-changing success with students. These 40 colleges and universities—two publics and 38 private from 24 states and with enrollments ranging from 350 to 4,000—were recognized in the book [Colleges That Change Lives](#).

<http://www.library.uiuc.edu/edx/rankgen.htm>

This site has links to and descriptions of a number of different college rankings systems (not just "you know who"). It examines the methodologies and has a link to a "Caution and Controversy" page.

<http://www.nextstepmagazine.com/nextstep/articlePage1.aspx?artId=2851&categoryId=1>

Finding the right fit – college rankings explained”

Does attending a highly ranked college really make that much of a difference in your teen’s life?

[http://www.philly.com/inquirer/opinion/20071004\\_Rethinking\\_college\\_rankings.html](http://www.philly.com/inquirer/opinion/20071004_Rethinking_college_rankings.html)

Philadelphia Inquirer article from Oct. 4, 2007 “Rethinking College Rankings” by Brian Mitchell, Chairman and past-president Assoc. of Independent Colleges and Univ. of PA

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/08/17/usnews>

Refusing to Rank – article from Inside Higher Education 8/17/08