

Fiske's Sizing-Yourself-Up Survey

With apologies to Socrates, knowing thyself is easier said than done. Most high school students can analyze a differential equation or a Shakespearean play with the greatest of ease, but when it comes to cataloging their own strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes, many draw a blank. But self-knowledge is crucial to the matching process at the heart of a successful college search. This 30-item survey offers a simple way to get a handle on some crucial issues in college selection—and what sort of college may fit your preferences.

In the space beside each statement, rate your feelings on a scale of 1 to 10, with:

10 = Strongly Agree

5 = Not Sure/Don't Have Strong Feelings

1 = Strongly Disagree

(For instance, a rating of 7 would mean that you agree with the statement, but that the issue is a lower priority than those you rated 8, 9, or 10.) After you're done, read on to "Grading Yourself" to find out what it all means.

Size

- ___ 1. I enjoy participating in many activities.
- ___ 2. I would like to have a prominent place in my community.
- ___ 3. Individual attention from teachers is important to me.
- ___ 4. I learn best when I can speak out in class and ask questions.
- ___ 5. I am undecided about what I will study.
- ___ 6. I want to earn a Ph.D. in my chosen field of study.
- ___ 7. I learn best by listening and writing down what I hear.
- ___ 8. I would like to be in a place where I can be anonymous if I choose.
- ___ 9. I prefer devoting my time to one or two activities rather than many.
- ___ 10. I want to attend a college that most people have heard of.
- ___ 11. I am interested in a career-oriented major.
- ___ 12. I like to be on my own.

Location

- ___ 13. I prefer a college in a warm or hot climate.
- ___ 14. I prefer a college in a cool or cold climate.
- ___ 15. I want to be near the mountains.
- ___ 16. I want to be near a lake or ocean.
- ___ 17. I prefer to attend a college in a particular state or region.
- ___ 18. I prefer to attend a college near my family.
- ___ 19. I want city life within walking distance of my campus.
- ___ 20. I want city life within driving distance of my campus.
- ___ 21. I want my campus to be surrounded by natural beauty.

Academics and Extracurriculars

- 22. I like to be surrounded by people who are freethinkers and nonconformists.
- 23. I like the idea of joining a fraternity or sorority.
- 24. I like rubbing shoulders with people who are bright and talented.
- 25. I like being one of the smartest people in my class.
- 26. I want to go to a prestigious college.
- 27. I want to go to a college where I can get an excellent education.
- 28. I want to try for an academic scholarship.
- 29. I want a diverse college.
- 30. I want a college where the students are serious about ideas.

Grading Yourself

Picking a college is not an exact science. People who are total opposites can be equally happy at the same college.

Nevertheless, particular types tend to do better at some colleges than others. Each item in the survey is designed to test your feelings on an important issue related to college selection. “Sizing Up the Survey” (below) offers commentary on each item.

Taken together, your responses may help you construct a tentative blueprint for your college search.

Statements

1–12 deal with the issue of size. Would you be happier at a large university or a small college? Here’s the trick: Add the sum of your responses to questions 1–6. Then make a second tally of your responses to 7–12. If the sum of 1–6 is larger, you may want to consider a small college. If 7–12 is greater, then perhaps a big school would be more to your liking. If the totals are roughly equal, you should probably consider colleges of various sizes.

Statements 13–21 deal with location. The key in this section is the intensity of your feeling. If you replied to number 13 with a 10, does that mean you are going to look only at schools in warm climates? Think hard. If you consider only schools within a certain region or state, you’ll be eliminating hundreds of possibilities. By examining your most intense responses—the 1s, 2s, 9s, and 10s—you’ll be able to create a geographic profile of likely options.

Statements 22–30 deal with big-picture issues related to the character and personality of the college that may be in your future. As before, pay attention to your most intense responses. Read on for a look at the significance of each question.

Sizing Up the Survey

1. I enjoy participating in many activities. Students at small colleges tend to have more opportunities to be involved in many activities. Fewer students means less competition for spots.
2. I would like to have a prominent place in my community. Student-council presidents and other would-be leaders take note: it is easier to be a big fish if you're swimming in a small pond.
3. Individual attention from teachers is important to me. Small colleges generally offer more one-on-one with faculty both in the classroom and the laboratory.
4. I learn best when I can speak out in class and ask questions. Students who learn from interaction and participation would be well-advised to consider a small college.
5. I am undecided about what I will study. Small colleges generally offer more guidance and support to students who are undecided. The exception: students who are considering a preprofessional or highly specialized major.
6. I want to earn a Ph.D. in my chosen field of study. A higher percentage of students at selective small colleges earn a Ph.D. than those who attend large institutions of similar quality.
7. I learn best by listening and writing down what I hear. Students who prefer lecture courses will find more of them at large institutions.
8. I would like to be in a place where I can be anonymous if I choose. At a large university, the supply of new faces is never-ending. Students who have the initiative can always reinvent themselves.
9. I prefer devoting my time to one or two activities rather than many. Students who are passionate about one activity—say, writing for the college newspaper—will often find higher quality at a bigger school.
10. I want to attend a college that most people have heard of. Big schools have more name recognition because they're bigger and have Division I athletic programs. Even the finest small colleges are relatively anonymous among the general public.
11. I am interested in a career-oriented major. More large institutions offer business, engineering, nursing, etc., though some excellent small institutions do so as well (depending on the field).
12. I like to be on my own. A higher percentage of students live off campus at large schools, which are more likely to be in urban areas than their smaller counterparts.
13. I prefer a college in a warm or hot climate. Keep in mind that the Southeast and the Southwest have far different personalities (not to mention humidity levels).

14. I prefer a college in a cool or cold climate. Consider the Midwest, where there are many fine schools that are notably less selective than those in the Northeast.
15. I want to be near the mountains. You're probably thinking Colorado or Vermont, but don't zero in too quickly. States from Maine to Georgia and Arkansas to Arizona have easy access to mountains.
16. I want to be near a lake or ocean. Oceans are only on the coasts, but keep in mind the Great Lakes, the Finger Lakes, etc. Think about whether you want to be on the water or, say, within a two-hour drive.
17. I prefer to attend a college in a particular state or region. Geographical blinders limit options. Even if you think you want a certain area of the country, consider at least one college located elsewhere just to be sure.
18. I prefer to attend a college near my family. Unless you're planning to live with Mom and Dad, it may not matter whether your college is a two-hour drive or a two-hour plane ride.
19. I want city life within walking distance of my campus. Check out the neighborhood(s) surrounding your campus. Urban campuses—even in the same city—can be wildly different.
20. I want city life within driving distance of my campus. Unless you're a hard-core urban dweller, a suburban perch near a city may beat living in the thick of one. Does public transportation or a campus shuttle help students get around?
21. I want my campus to be surrounded by natural beauty. A college viewbook will take you only so far. To really know if you'll fall in love with the campus, visiting is a must.
22. I like to be surrounded by people who are freethinkers and nonconformists. Plenty of schools cater specifically to students who buck the mainstream. Talk to your counselor or browse the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* to find some.
23. I like the idea of joining a fraternity or sorority. Greek life is strongest at mainstream and conservative-leaning schools. Find out if there is a split between Greeks and non-Greeks.
24. I like rubbing shoulders with people who are bright and talented. This is perhaps the best reason to aim for a highly selective institution, especially if you're the type who rises to the level of the competition.
25. I like being one of the smartest people in my class. If so, maybe you should skip the highly selective rat race. Star students get the best a college has to offer.
26. I want to go to a prestigious college. There is nothing wrong with wanting prestige. Think honestly about how badly you want a big-name school and act accordingly.
27. I want to go to a college where I can get an excellent education. Throw out the *U.S. News* rankings and think about which colleges will best meet your needs as a student.



28. I want to try for an academic scholarship. Students in this category should consider less-selective alternatives. Scholarships are more likely if you rank high in the applicant pool.

29. I want a diverse college. All colleges pay lip service to diversity. To get the truth, see the campus for yourself and take a hard look at the student-body statistics in the *Fiske Guide's* write-ups.

30. I want a college where students are serious about ideas. Don't assume that a college necessarily attracts true intellectuals merely because it is highly selective. Some top schools are known for their intellectual climate—and others for their lack of it.