COLLEGE for RURAL WISCONSIN

# The College Search & Selection Process

by College for Rural Wisconsin's Rural Peer Advisors

## Identifying Your Wants and Needs in Post-secondary Education

This handout was designed by a team of current college students (Rural Peer Advisors) at UW-Madison to aid high school students at the start of their college exploration journey. In this handout, you will find a series of exercises made to be completed in order by a current high school student with support from a parent or guardian as needed.

### Step #1: Collecting Your Data

Start by filling out the table below. You will reference this table again in later steps. Please refer to your unofficial transcript for help on where to find your GPA, class ranking, and a list of the advanced placement courses you have taken or are currently enrolled in. This can often be found on your school district's website or the platform your school uses to access students' grades.

| **Student's Current Data** | |
|---|---|
| GPA | |
| Class ranking | |
| Number of advanced placement (AP) courses taken | |
| List of AP course(s) completed, and score received on the exam | |

### Step #2: The Three Buckets Model

The three buckets model is a tool used to help students sort prospective colleges and universities into three different categories based on a set of criteria.

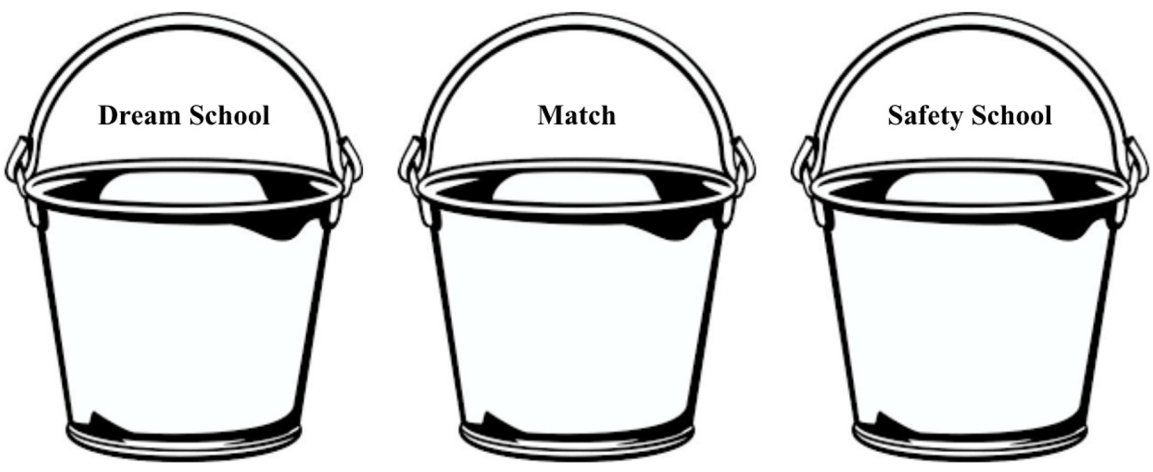
Firstly, create a list of all the colleges/universities that you are considering on a separate sheet of paper. The longer the list, the more you will have to work with during the upcoming steps, so please feel free to add any schools that you are interested in to your list. Everything is on the table at this stage, so don't limit yourself!

We use the term college to generally refer to all post-secondary educational options. This includes 2-year, 4-year, public and private colleges and universities.

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Next, go through and place the schools on your list into one of the following three buckets, "Dream School", "Match", or "Safety School", based on the criteria listed in their descriptions below.

Use the college/university's website (or any of the website tools we provided for you as a resource at the end of this handout) to find out what academic criteria they have for incoming students (e.g. do they require a minimum GPA?)




1. **Dream School**
    a. The student's academic data (refer back to the table on the first page) may fall below in more than one area, but their application would still be considered.
    b. This category represents an aspiration – the college/university you hope you attend.
2. **Match**
    a. This is the "right fit" for a student.
    b. A school that will be both academically challenging, while also being both socially and emotionally fulfilling.
    c. The student falls somewhere in the middle of admission requirements (compare your data from the first page with standard admissions metrics for that school).
3. **Safety School**
    a. It's guaranteed that they will be admitted based on academic qualifications and school admission requirements.
    b. Student falls above or average on all or most admission requirements and academic qualifications.
    c. This should still be a school that the student could envision themselves at. If the student does not feel like they could be happy at the school, don't consider it as an option.

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## Step #3: Assessment Rating of Key Characteristics

For this step, you will rank the characteristics of a school listed in the table below from "of little importance" to "very important" depending on your personal preference. Put a check mark in the column of your ranking of each characteristic. Feel free to add other characteristics that aren't included at the end of the table. Characteristics are arranged in no particular order.

By ranking key characteristics of different colleges/universities, students can better understand what characteristics they value in a college/university.

| Characteristic | Of Little Importance | Somewhat Important | Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|
| Location | | | |
| Size | | | |
| Academic programs available | | | |
| Extracurriculars | | | |
| Cost | | | |
| Diversity | | | |
| Internship opportunities | | | |
| Research opportunities | | | |
| Career support | | | |
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## Step #4: Ranking Your Top Choices

You're at the last step! Now, using the characteristics that you have identified as "Very Important" in Step 3, compare the schools listed in each bucket against one another to determine which school in each of the three categories is your top choice.

Below is an example of how you might choose to organize your comparison of a single school against the characteristics you have identified as being very important. Fill in the school's name at the top of the table and place a "✓" or an "X" in the rows underneath to indicate whether or not that particular institution meets your wants for that characteristic. For example, if you identified "location" as being very important to you because you want to attend a school in state, you would place a checkmark to the right of "location" for a school such as UW-Madison, which is in-state. To compare more than one college/university at a time, you can add multiple columns to the right of the table.

| **Very Important Characteristics** | **School Name:** | **School Name:** |
|---|---|---|
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The colleges/universities which have the most check marks can be placed towards the top of their respective buckets, and the schools with the fewest check marks can be placed near the bottom of their respective buckets. Lots goes into college search and exploration, so feel free to play around with the exact order until you feel that your top choices are right.