

EDU UTAH

Planning for your fu

4 steps to choosing the right school

Step 1 Take some time to plan your plan.

It's a good idea to begin with a self-assessment. Determining what your goals are and what you'll want to get (and not get) out of your college experience is a great place to start your search. Learning about yourself will allow you to find a college that fits your needs.

- ✓ Why, really, are you going?
- ✓ What are you best (and worst) at?
- ✓ What do you want out of college — out of life?
- ✓ Will you be more comfortable and happier on your own, or is the support of friends and family crucial to you?

Be sure to include family, friends and people you trust in considering these issues. People who know you can offer insights and perspectives that can help you see the big picture.

Step 2 Make a list and check it twice.

Narrow the possibilities according to:

- ✓ Location
- ✓ Price
- ✓ Programs
- ✓ Financial aid options
- ✓ Activities
- ✓ Size

Find the colleges that appeal to you. Compare them. Write the comparisons down. On paper. Look at your list — then look at it again. Consider what makes sense to you given your circumstances.

Step 3 Make financial plans.

Of course, a simple cost-comparison between the schools on your list will help you. A closer inspection of the variety of financial aid packages, scholarship possibilities and even work-study programs

can make a dramatic difference in your bottom line. If you simply assume that a college on your list isn't a possibility based on the "sticker price" of tuition, you might miss a perfect — and perfectly affordable — option.

The schools you're interested in will also have on-line help and financial aid officers ready to help. A little time spent investigating these areas will pay huge dividends later in your education. Look early and ask for help often.

Step 4 Visit colleges online and in-person.

Check out the websites for the colleges on your list. Use the websites to take virtual tours, research programs, activities and request information.

There's no substitute for a college visit. If you arrive at a school and can't picture

yourself in that environment — in these buildings with the professors, students, and surroundings there — it may not be the school for you.

When you get there, take some time to sit in on classes you might be interested in, eat where the students eat and hang out in the local hot spots. Strike up a conversation with students — find out about what they think about their college and their decision to go there.

When you've done these things, go through this list again and then make a decision. You have many options, but you don't have to be overwhelmed by them. You have great options and you can make a great decision.

SOURCE: Joy Tlou is the Director of Public Relations at Salt Lake Community College. He has spent the past 25 years working in higher education as a Director of Advising, Admission Counselor and Enrollment Management Consultant.