College Fit

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The first thing that comes to people’s mind when they think of saving money on college is scholarships, grants, and loans. But a large factor that isn’t taken into consideration is graduation time. A 2015 report by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found that 36.6% of college students transfer and that nearly half of those do it more than once. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 6-year graduation rate in fall of 2009 was 59%. Meaning that of the students that entered college in 2009, 59% of them graduated in 2015 instead of the intended 2013. Another study in 2014 done by the federal government found that 40 percent of transfer student get no credit for any of the courses they have completed and lose 27 credits on average — or about a year of school. These losses in time and money are irrecoverable and if avoided could save students on years of tuition.

This is where College Fit comes into the picture. In high school, when choosing colleges, a very proactive student could look at maybe 30 colleges, but likely less than that. This is a problem as there are hundreds if not thousands of colleges that he or she cannot consider. With College Fit, a student can tell an application what they want in an ideal college, and the application will give him or her a list of colleges that would best match that ideal college.

The way it works on that back end is that there is a script that scrapes review data from sites like niche.com or U.S. News College Rankings. After gathering the reviews, the data would be combined and put though a program that uses a natural language processing API, such as Google Cloud Natural Language Processing, or IBM’s Watson. By running a sentiment analysis, the program can find the specific advantages and disadvantages of each aspect of a college. From that point, there would need to be another program that weights the salience (importance/relevance) and of each general area (sports, academics, extra-curriculars, etc) as well as more specific groups (in sports: baseball, tennis, etc.) After all the information is sorted and weighted, it will be compared to the provided student data. The student data could be gathered in multiple ways including an few paragraphs about what they want in their ideal college, or a survey with choices such as “A good physics department is important to me, rate 1-5 with 1 being it is not important”. By using this data to create a profile of the student, we can used a combination of the college’s and student’s difference in their weights and sentiments to arrive at a score that can predict how well a college would match a given student.

Further expansion of this idea could integrate factors like specific scholarships made available to specific demographics.

Thus, by providing students with more as well as better fitting options for college, the probability that they will have to spend time in school that isn’t right for them (whether that be academically or socially) is much lower, and by eliminating excess time spent in school, it would save many students money.