

SHOULD YOU CHOOSE A PUBLIC OR PRIVATE COLLEGE?

By Jon Fortenbury
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All you have to do is Google “private colleges vs. public colleges” to see a face-off that’s been ongoing probably before you were born. But clearly, there must be a winner by now, right? Or is the answer of which type of school is better, private or public, a subjective one? Let’s see if we can resolve this debate, to pronounce a winner once and for all.

THE MAIN DIFFERENCES

First, let’s look at the major differences between public and private colleges, as pointed out in an article by the staff at higher education company Peterson’s:



FUNDING

Public colleges are funded mostly by state governments, whereas **private** colleges rely heavily on private contributions, donations and tuition.



SIZE

Public colleges typically have more students and degree offerings than **private** colleges.



CLASS SIZE

Private colleges typically have smaller class sizes than **public** colleges, although it should be pointed out that many public colleges offer smaller classes.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Public colleges typically have more in-state students, due to in-state incentives, whereas **private** colleges tend to admit more out-of-state students. Of course, it depends on the school, though.

These are some pretty big differences, affecting both how schools are ran and a student’s experience there. But only you can determine how much these details matter to you.

THE CASE FOR PUBLIC COLLEGES

There are many great reasons to go to a public college. Public colleges, on average, cost less than private colleges. Here’s the average tuition costs for the 2012-13 school year, according to a report by The College Board:



**PUBLIC 4 YEAR
IN-STATE**
\$8,655

**PUBLIC 4 YEAR
OUT-OF-STATE**
\$21,706

**PRIVATE 4 YEAR
NON-PROFIT**
\$29,056

The lower cost is just one of the multiple ways public colleges excel over private colleges, according to Campus Explorer CEO Jerry Slavonia.

“If you’re more independent, decent at maneuvering through bureaucracy and enjoy higher energy environments, public schools are built for you,” Slavonia said. “Public colleges also tend to be more diverse in population and students do typically graduate with less debt.”

You may also find higher acceptance rates at public colleges than private schools, depending on the college. This reason alone may make it at least wise to include one or more public colleges in schools you apply to.

THE CASE FOR PRIVATE COLLEGES

There’s no shortage of good reasons to attend a private college, either, according to Slavonia.

“Private colleges tend to have greater resources available to students, generally speaking,” said Slavonia, though it should be noted that it really does depend on the school. “Private colleges may cost a bit more but you’re more likely to get access to what you need, when you need it.”

Stephanie Belsky, a 2006 graduate of Ithaca College in upstate New York, experienced the perks of a private college firsthand. She loved the personal attention of the school and faculty at her school.

“It felt like they (Ithaca College) not only wanted students to succeed but that the staff and faculty would do everything they could to make sure after you graduate you would have a job and marketable skills that would translate into your resume,” Belsky said.

Belsky also appreciated how some of her Ithaca College professors were willing to get coffee with students or spend time with them outside of class, to hear them out on something or to better understand their concerns.

AND THE WINNER IS...

So, did we once and for all resolve the debate of private colleges vs. public colleges?

Not really. Each student will answer that question differently and find the right school for them, whether it’s public or private. According to Slavonia, students should approach the college decision the same way they would approach a committed relationship.

“It’s a major investment,” Slavonia said. “You naturally want a high return on your investment but don’t kid yourself: Colleges have traits just like people do so it’s important to find a college that will be a good partner and create a successful outcome. You can do that by being smart about what you consider important in a school.”

What’s important to one student may be futile to another. Some students may prefer the small class sizes of private colleges, whereas another student may prefer a large public school. Regardless, neither kind of college is bad. Both kinds of schools can prepare you for your future career, supply great networking events and grant you the best college experience you can imagine.

The winner is whichever school you decide to go to. Choose wisely and think it through extensively, seeking the necessary counsel and resources.

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