You're sitting in class, waiting for the bell to ring, and you're dreaming of that day when you cram the pickup full of stereo equipment and head for that grand adventure we all know as college.

A smile curls over your lips. Your eyes glaze over. Great parties! New friends! Finally on your own! No curfew!


Yes, college will be fun... but it will also be hard work. And some of that work, if you're smart, begins right now—even if you're a freshman in high school.

**Why College?**
Better pay and better opportunities, that's why. And for most jobs, especially in agriculture, you need more than a high school education. By the year 2000, most occupations will require a minimum of at least one year of education after high school says Kimberly Perry, executive director of the National Postsecondary Agricultural Student (PAS) Organization.

The job opportunities look better as you climb the education ladder. A 1990 USDA study predicted a shortfall of 11% for agricultural jobs such as weed, soil, and plant scientists, engineers, veterinarians, managers and financial specialists that require bachelor degrees (four years of college), masters degrees (five-plus years), and doctorate degrees (up to seven years).

USDA recently updated its agricultural career outlook and reconfirms that job opportunities will be brightest for four-year college grads, says Joe Kunzman, academic program director for agriculture and natural resources at the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC).

"Students who go on to a four-year university make, on the average, about a million dollars more in income during their lifetime compared to high school grads."

--Roselyn Hiebert

"A four-year degree is almost an imperative if you want to be a successful member of the agricultural workforce."

Kunzman adds, "In agriculture you'll find a much more educated workforce than in any other industry. That was true in the past, and it has become more so today."

College grads do make more money, says Roselyn Hiebert, director of Public Affairs for NASULGC. "We find, in general, that students who go on to a four-year university make, on the average, about a million dollars more in income than their lifetime compared to high school graduates," she says. A Michigan State University study says starting salaries for agricultural graduates average $23,319 per year.

"Right now, we have a job market that is tough," says Hiebert, "but the college graduates tend to be higher on the job list."

**Which One?**
Let's start with a community college or technical school. Here you can fill three educational options, starting with a certificate, degree or diploma, where you usually attend school for one year to receive a hands-on, skill-oriented education.
One example of a job that needs this level of training is an agricultural mechanic, says Perry. "It seems in that area there are many employment opportunities for people with a certificate degree," she says. Likewise for ornamental horticulture, where you can get your certificate, land an entry level job, and later go back for more education if needed. "Some ornamental horticulture employers even give their employees time off to complete their associate degree if they already have their certificate," she says.

The associate degree is another community college option. This is a two-year degree that provides a general education for entry level technician jobs. "Probably the most notable that comes to peoples minds would be an animal health technician, working in a veterinarian or research office," Perry says. "A lot of laboratory support staff are people with a two-year degree."

A third option is a two-year community college degree that then transfers to a university where you can continue your education to receive a bachelors degree.

For a well-rounded education with a wide range of academic study options, you might want to enroll at a university or four-year college.

**Pros and Cons, Community College Versus Four-Year College**

A community college has certain advantages over a university or four-year college experience. "For a transfer student, not only is it the same education at less cost, but often the class sizes are much smaller so you get individual attention," says Perry. "It also gives students who are unsure about their careers a chance to take some exploratory classes."

Most students who attend a community college commute to class every day from home. Here there are fewer structured social activities. "Community and technical colleges lend themselves to people who need to go to work and go to school" says Perry, "Community colleges are more flexible, allowing students to do that."

The university experience offers its own advantages beyond the ones noted earlier. Unlike a community college, you are living away from home in a "campus" atmosphere with other students your age in dorms, apartments, fraternities, or sororities. On most campuses you can participate in intramural athletic events, theatrical performances, science fairs and mind-bending lectures. You can find almost any club or group that suits your interests, from mountain climbing to computer hacking.

University class sizes, at least for freshmen, are often larger, causing greater competition among students and less personal attention from professors. And a four-year degree may give you a better shot at the good jobs, but it comes at a price. In 1991-92 costs for tuition, room and board, averaged $5,181 per year for US public colleges, and universities (excluding community colleges, which may cost around half that much), says Kusman.

Oops! Sounds like another good reason to start thinking about college now.

Helping Your Child Decide On A College Doesn’t Have To Be Difficult Or Stressful

by Jane Spencer

The secret of selecting the best college is starting early so that you and your child have enough time to carefully evaluate the choices. Here’s how my daughter Amanda and I began our college search several years ago and what we learned.

Choosing Schools

- Decide what you and your child want from a college. There are now hundreds of colleges and universities in the U.S. While it’s impossible to evaluate them all, you can narrow the list considerably by finding out from your child what he/she wants from a college. The best time to begin seriously discounting the matter—if your child is open to it—is during the first half of your child’s junior year in high school.

**Strategy:** Ask him or her to describe his or her dream school, the kind of courses she would like to take, the students on campus, activities in which she would participate, the size of the school and its location. The answers will help a great deal.

If your child doesn’t have a feeling now for the size of the school or the part of the country she’d prefer, don’t push for a choice. Those preferences will become clear after you’ve seen a few schools. Important: If you would prefer your child to pick a school near home or if you can’t afford $20,000 a year tuition, now is the time to discuss those issues.

Once you know what types of colleges you want to consider, your child’s high school counselor can help by putting together a list of schools that meet your initial criteria.

- Consider schools outside the region in which you live. Most kids attend schools that are near their homes. It’s easier to find out about these schools from college counselors and peers, and they are cheaper to visit and easier to travel home from on breaks. But keep an open mind—and help your child keep an open mind. There are some real gems through the country that are sometimes overlooked.

**Examples:** I’ve found that people in the East tend to overlook excellent Western and Midwestern colleges, such as Evergreen in Washington State, Lawrence in Wisconsin, and Grinnell in Iowa. The same is true of Westerners, who tend to neglect schools such as Davidson in North Carolina, Bates in Maine, and Lafayette in Pennsylvania. Again, college reference books and your child’s counselor can help present you with choices.

- Schedule visits to colleges that are near the ones you intend to see. Once you’ve identified one or two schools you would like to visit in a region, find out what other colleges are in the vicinity.

**Reasons:** Though they weren’t on your main list, they may trigger thoughts of the future in your child that were not expressed before. It also may turn out that one of those is better suited to your child than the main contenders.

**Visiting The Schools**

- Begin visiting schools in the spring of your child’s junior year. Many people do not begin visiting colleges until their kids are seniors. But starting earlier can take some of the pressure
off your child later. Example: My daughter saw college anxiety sweep over her classmates during her senior year. There was so much for them to worry about as seniors—grades, college applications and their own activities.

Starting the visiting and interview process during her junior year gave my daughter an edge, and she felt less vulnerable to the anxieties that her friends were feeling.

- **Set up interviews before you arrive.** Interviews with admissions officers may be an important part of the admissions process at any college. Example: When my daughter began visiting colleges far from home, we decided she should take care of her interviews while she was there. It made more sense than making a second trip.

Request to be interviewed by an admissions officer rather than by a student intern. My daughter’s experience suggests that interviews with professionals are generally better. The interviewer will likely be better skilled at drawing out your child and responding to your child’s comments, resulting in a better interview experience.

Note: Some schools will not start interviewing juniors until May or June, but you can be interviewed without having filed an application.

- **Visit schools when they are in session.** If you and your child visit a college when its students are on break, you won’t see the school as it really is. It’s the other students--more than the academics or location of the school—that will play the greatest role in your child’s enjoyment of the school.

Example: When my daughter and I visited one Midwestern school, she liked the school but the students were mainly from the area, and she didn’t think she would fit in. Other schools were too relaxed, too preppy or just not diverse enough. If we had visited while classes were out, she wouldn’t have been able to make those judgments.

- **Don’t visit more than two schools in one day.** I’m an advocate of visiting as many colleges as you can. But my daughter and I didn’t visit more than two schools on any one day. Otherwise, we couldn’t spend as much time at each school as we would have liked, and we would have lost track of what we had seen at each campus. Better: Take a little more time at this stage, or you may need a second trip.

Strategy: If you are visiting a lot of schools during one trip, record all your impressions of each school in a notebook while they are still fresh in your mind. Have your child do the same. Your notes will come in handy later when all the schools start to seem the same.

- **Encourage your child to form her own opinions.** You can play an important role when visiting schools with your child. In particular, parents can help children focus on their areas of interest, and then ask questions to help clarify what they like or don’t like about a particular school. Try not to color your child’s impression of the school with your own. You should also avoid comparing college life today to when you attended school.

A visit to a college is an experience that makes kids think about what their lives have been like so far and where they want to go. A parent’s input can be valuable, but let your child have all the opinions while on campus.

Janet Spencer, JD, is a professor of law at St John’s University in New York and co-author of The Princeton Review Student Access Guide to Visiting College Campuses.

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**Considering A Kansas College? You’ll Need These Classes First**

by Traci Carl

Associated Press Writer

WICHITA—Kansas 8th graders who want to ensure they can go to college in the state will have to start preparing next fall.

On Thursday, the State Board of Regents approved without dissent a curriculum standards that will be in place when they enter universities as freshmen in the fall of 2001.

Currently, any graduate from a Kansas high school can attend on of the state’s universities in Lawrence, Manhattan, Wichita, Emporia, Pittsburg and Hays. Kansas is the only state with open admission.

The 1996 legislature passed a law requiring that seniors graduating in 2001 either graduate in the top one-third of their class, score a 21 on the American College Testing program -- also known as the ACT -- or achieve a 2.0 grade-point-average on a 4.0 scale, and complete a pre-college curriculum. That pre-college curriculum will include:

- Four years of English or language arts;
- One year of computer technology;
- Three years of mathematics;
- Three years of social sciences;
- Three years of science classes.

Students also are strongly encouraged to complete two years of a foreign language, although it is not required.

The regents also approved the curriculum for the state’s three scholarship programs -- the State Scholars Program, the Ethnic Minority Scholarship, and the Teacher Education Scholarship.

The scholarship curriculum is the same as the pre-college curriculum, except it will require two years of a foreign language and an additional mathematics course, and it will not allow applied science courses as required science credits.

People 21 and older won’t be affected under the new law, and graduating seniors who don’t meet admission standards can get into a state university if they earn a 2.0 grade-point-average after taking 24 credit hours at a community college.

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