

WELCOME TO PAGE 217\* - an introduction to and resource for the world of higher education presented by Eric J. Furda, Dean of Admissions at the University of Pennsylvania, and Penn class of 1987.

## 4 C's

Posted on [August 6, 2012](#) by [Dean Furda](#)

After looking within yourself, consider the 5 most important characteristics that you want out of your college experience. Then assess colleges with these preferences in mind and through a framework I refer to as the 4 C's.

1. Culture: What is the history and mission of the institution. How is the mission relevant today?
2. Curriculum: More than a listing of majors and programs, what is the design and aim of the courses you will take over 4 years?
3. Community: Who are the people, the physical spaces of campus and the relationship of the campus to the local environment?
4. Conclusions: What should I envision for myself at the end of my college experience? What are some of the outcomes I may expect?

**CULTURE:** What is the culture of the colleges that you are looking at or looking for? For a lot of schools, history shapes culture. For a place like Penn, as an example, our founding father, Benjamin Franklin, continues to shape the energy and philosophy of our campus. Franklin was a pragmatic person—a practical person. When he moved from Boston to Philadelphia, as a seventeen year-old high school dropout, he was absolutely broke yet literally and figuratively hungry. Franklin believed that learning—theory—is critically important but what you do with that knowledge—practice—is even more important. He wanted to get things done. Penn's culture is very much shaped by that mentality. Penn students aspire to making the impact that Franklin, as an inventor, a statesman, and founder of the first university (Penn), the first hospital, and the first post office, had on his community. So dig into the ideas, narratives, and people that shape the culture of those schools on your list and think about how your aspirations fit into these unique settings.

**CURRICULUM:** A college's curriculum is critically important and it's something that a lot of people don't look at as closely as they should. The conversation for applicants—and their parents—should not stop at course titles and availability yet should extend to deeper questions. How are you going to be taught? What are you going to learn? What is the setting for learning? If you're looking at undergraduate engineering schools, there will be more curricular similarities than differences because of the structure implicit to an engineer's training. However, when you talk about the liberal arts and sciences, the range of curricular options varies from schools that have an open curriculum, to schools that have a core curriculum, to schools that have requirements but allow for student choice. Curricular questions touch everything from the freshman experience—What are you taking as a freshman? What does your freshman program look like?—to the process of declaring a major—When must you declare your major and what advising is available to you during this process? Do they have a major that you are interested in?—to faculty-student interaction—How does your learning experience get shaped by the faculty at the school? These questions are often overlooked when students only look at the name of a school without thinking about the learning that is taking place at that institution.

**COMMUNITY:** The community around you will be your home away from home for four years. It goes without saying that this should be a space where you feel comfortable being yourself. It's essential to learn what life is really like at the schools on your list. The people on campus will be your peers, educators, and friends. What are the people like? How would you describe the larger student body? Have you interacted with or researched the faculty? The physical campus is also important to your experience. A lot of times a school community is shaped by location. Are you looking for an urban campus or maybe something on the opposite side of the country from your hometown? The campus design does the work of distilling everybody together and encouraging community. When you visit schools, think about where everyone—the electrical engineer, business major, fine arts major, physics enthusiast and history buff—hangs out, all together? Where on campus do students' worlds intersect? At Penn, it's Locust Walk. For a lot of colleges it's a main quad area. Pay special attention to

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communities that speak to your personal passions. Say I'm interested in athletics, I should learn what the athletic community is like. Do people go to games? Are club sports available? Learn as much as you can about those communities that you know you want to join and revel in the possibility of joining many more. The campus, with its students and faculty, in a larger urban, suburban or rural space, will be your home for the next four years – take time to investigate it.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The final assessment is about conclusions – some students might call this careers, others may say outcomes. Ask what students are studying at this school and how are they translating this work into what they do later on? What is important to current students and how do these priorities change and play out over time? Is it important to them to make an impact on this world, to be engaged civically, or to get things done? Are they impacting society around them both before and after their graduation date?

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Comments are closed.

**\*PAGE 217**

refers to the always legendary and occasionally dreaded essay which was once a mainstay of the University of Pennsylvania application. The question read as follows: "You have just finished your three hundred page autobiography. Please submit page 217."

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