

The great Beyond: Finding your ideal college

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THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

Posted Nov 10, 2008 @ 11:59 PM

Each fall, high-school seniors across the country gear up to do what they've been preparing for most of their high-school career: apply for college.

It can be a confusing time. From trying to find the perfect school and the pressure of submitting an application to the terror of opening the acceptance letter, high-school students can face many difficulties when making college decisions.

To help make some decisions easier, here is an inside look at local colleges — a community college, a public university and a private university — and their admissions processes. Most colleges nationwide follow similar admissions guidelines.

Lincoln Land Community College

For students who feel intimidated by a university or aren't quite ready — financially or emotionally — to make such a big move so soon after graduating high school, a community college can be a good way to transition into higher education.

"It's typical of a high-school student to have their sights set on a big college or university," said Ron Gregoire, director of admissions and records at LLCC. "I know Lincoln Land is not always a top choice, but a lot of students come out here and visit our campus and talk to students who are successful, and they change their mind."

Community college is an accessible option for many teens. With prices for LLCC ranging from about \$2,000 to \$3,000 for a full-time student, community college often is affordable for a diverse group of teens.

"We get everything from students at the top of their class to some students who need some academics before moving on to a major state college or university," Gregoire said.

Lincoln Land, he said, encourages students to continue searching for the perfect university while getting a solid education at an affordable rate.

"A lot of people are looking for an economical way to get some of the core classes out of the way," Gregoire said. "Whether you went to U of I or Lincoln Land, if you want to be a brain surgeon, you're going to take some of the same courses your first year."

Lincoln Land seeks to help students achieve an associate's degree, take just a few classes or work toward a career goal. Gregoire said many students choose community college for its proximity to home and the option to continue working at a local job.

LLCC's admissions process follows an open admissions policy. A high-school student should send in a transcript, ACT scores and a completed application either by mail, online or in person. Students then will receive instructions about placement tests and campus orientation.

LLCC hopes to make the process as smooth as possible.

"In theory, if a student came in with their high-school transcripts, a student could get (the admissions process) done in one morning," Gregoire said. "A student could walk in the door and walk out with a college schedule."

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT SPRINGFIELD

Many college-bound seniors picture attending the huge state school with a budding campus. The University of Illinois at Springfield offers both the benefits of a large university and the connection of a small campus, said assistant director of admissions Kathryn Kleeman.

Kleeman said UIS attracts students who want personal attention and are set on succeeding.

"They want to be involved," Kleeman said. "Our students are fairly outgoing, but they want more personal attention, and they are also not afraid to go to a school where maybe no one else in their class is going."

Students interested in applying to UIS and most public schools, Kleeman said, should file an application that includes their personal and academic statement, transcripts and test scores.

Deadlines also are important at such schools; UIS offers rolling admission, where applications are reviewed as they arrive and are returned to students in 4-8 weeks until March 1, or until the freshman class is full.

UIS is a small school, enrolling about 300 to 340 freshman each year, Kleeman said. But the benefits of being part of the University of Illinois add to the

quality, including a shared library system and inter-campus exchange program.

Another benefit typical of public schools is the cost. At just less than \$20,000 for tuition, fees, room and board, UIS falls in the mid-range of cost for most public schools.

Other benefits include the housing and campus-life options available to students. UIS offers residence-style housing as well as apartment-style living. Kleeman said the apartments offer a "more grown-up feel for students."

The living arrangements are just one of the many changing, expanding options at UIS. Kleeman said the college's short history as a four-year university is a major benefit for students.

"I think the fact that we're a growing institution makes us unique," she said. "People here — students and faculty — have a chance to make history and start their own traditions."

ILLINOIS COLLEGE

When contemplating their future college experience, many teens picture the wind blowing leaves across a busy courtyard, students studying together in the library, familiar faces and other images often associated with a private, four-year college.

The major benefit of a private school, said Barbara Lundberg, the vice president for enrollment at Illinois College in Jacksonville, is the personal attention. The one-on-one experience, she said, begins with the application.

"The best way to describe the admissions process is that it is a very specialized process," Lundberg said. "Every student is looked at as an individual; we take great pride in reviewing each student's application."

Lundberg said Illinois College's admissions process is typical of most private schools: Students must submit an application, a high-school transcript, test scores and a letter of recommendation.

After acceptance, she said, the focus is still on the student. Though there is no typical IC student, Lundberg said there is a certain caliber of student that attends an institution like Illinois College.

"They're just a really wonderful cross-section of today's young people," said Lundberg, using such words as motivated, mature, responsible and involved to describe the private school's students.

At a private institution, Lundberg said, these students receive benefits such as getting to know professors, experiencing a community of education in the liberal arts and utilizing campus resources. One program IC offers to students, called Break Away, takes students on a faculty-led, two-week tour of destinations including Spain and Taiwan, as well as the Democratic National Convention.

Lundberg said private institutions can offer such programs because of the "tremendous amount of flexibility" in course scheduling, faculty and size compared to a typical state school.

The flexibility comes at a price, though, with many institutions costing more than the traditional public school. Illinois College costs \$25,700 for room, board and fees.

Lundberg suggests that high-school students take many college visits and do research to help learn which schools are right for them. Finding the perfect college, she said, is like finding the perfect pair of jeans; some will be too big, some too small, some will cost too much, some won't cover enough, but the perfect pair is out there.

"Eventually you find a pair of jeans that fit you just right," she said. "Finding a college is like that."

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