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Redesigning Choice Architecture for the College Selection and Application Process for High School Juniors

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Redesigning Choice Architecture for the College Selection and Application Process for High School Juniors

Lindsey Estep

Thesis submitted to the
College of Creative Arts School of Art and Design
West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Art & Design

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Morgantown, West Virginia
2014

Key Words: *choice architecture, data visualization, college selection,
college application, knowledge pyramid, design*

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ABSTRACT

Redesigning Choice Architecture for the College Selection and Application Process for High School Juniors

Lindsey Estep

Choice architecture, a term coined in the 2008 book *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* by behavioral scientist Richard H. Thaler and professor of law Cass R. Sunstein, is the belief that no choice can be neutral because the way in which a choice is presented influences the decision-maker. Designers, perfectly positioned to structure choices in both print and digital format, should equally embrace this role and handle it with great responsibility. Rather than use the power to structure choice architecture to bolster consumerism, we should instead harness the opportunity to help individuals make choices that improve their health, finances, relationships, and prospects – thereby creating change that could scale to families, communities, states, and even entire nations.

This project is an exploration of the ways a designer can structure the choice architecture for the first major life decision many young folks face – which college to attend. Considered within the context of the current West Virginia college landscape, and using qualitative and quantitative data gathered from a group representing the target audience, the project provides a model for leading students through the complex process of evaluating options and making a decision that is best suited to their situation, without encroaching on their freedom of choice.

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To my family and friends, thank you for your encouragement. And to my husband Greg, thank you for all those nights you washed dishes so that I could get in a few more minutes of work. It did not go unnoticed. :)

I have been so blessed with opportunities in my personal and professional life that could have only come from above.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, in 2011 only 20.4% of West Virginia residents ages 25-64 had a Bachelor degree or higher, the lowest rate in the United States (NCHEMS 2011). Furthermore, West Virginia has one of the highest percentages of population living below the poverty line when compared to other states (Bishaw 2012). A choropleth map titled “Combating Poverty in the Mountain State” (Figure 1) that presents evidence that one’s chance of living below the poverty line decreases as education increases, served as the primary driver to explore college-going rates in West Virginia. A few counties on this map stood out among their peers, one of which was Gilmer County, located near the center of the state. Gilmer County was nearly the worst county out of a state that was nearly the worst in the nation. While this map seemingly indicates the opportunity for a better financial future with a college education, just over half of Gilmer County High School students are going to college (West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission 2014). This is made even more perplexing by the fact that there is a respected and affordable four-year college located less than one mile from the high school itself.

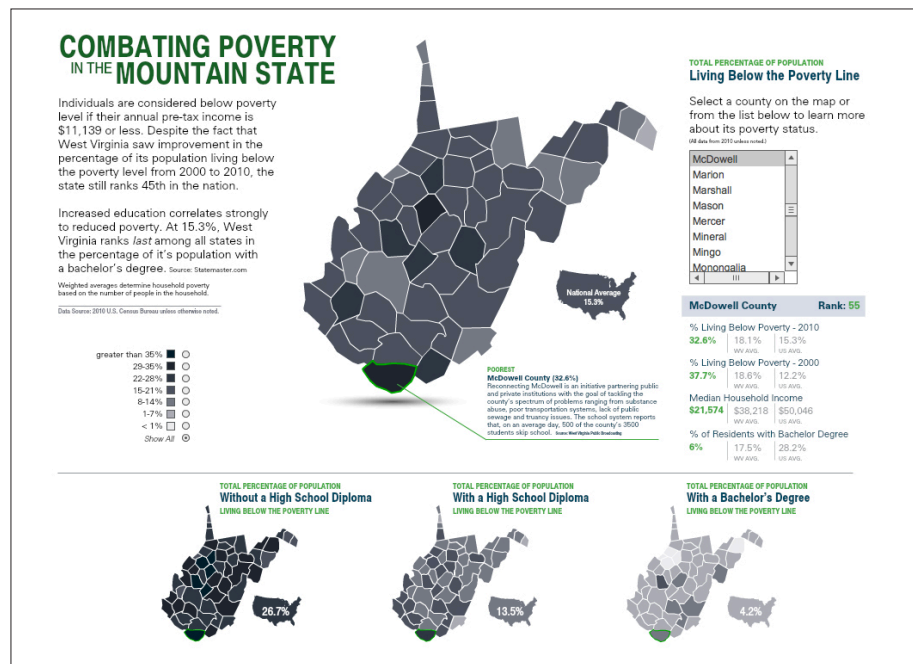


Figure 1. Choropleth map showing percentage of population living below the poverty level by degree level. Lindsey Estep, 2012.

There are many reasons that high school graduates do not continue on to college. Among those reasons, students may claim:

“I can’t afford to go to college.” (COST)

“I could be making money for the next four years instead.” (LOST EARNINGS)

“I barely made it through high school.” (NOT SMART ENOUGH)

“I’ll go once I figure out what I want to do for a career.”
(NOT SURE WHAT TO STUDY)

“I have no use for Art History.” (ONLY NEED CERTAIN SKILLS)

“It’s too much work just to get to college.” (DON’T KNOW
WHERE TO START)

While all of these reasons are worth exploring, this project seeks to provide a solution to the last justification on that list by removing unnecessary complexity in the process of selecting and applying to a college. As many of us have experienced in life, just breaking through the inertia or fear to get started actually *is* the most difficult part of a difficult task. The average seventeen-year-old evaluates options, makes choices, and adheres to requirements every day. While these same tasks are central to the college selection and application process—and should therefore be familiar to high school students—the primary difference between making a college selection and the other daily choices that a student makes, is that West Virginia college choices are not presented in a way that facilitates a fair or easy comparison between schools. Furthermore, the timeline for receiving feedback from those choices is far longer than seventeen year-olds are accustomed to in their daily lives. All of a sudden, seventeen year olds are thrust into a world of months-long timelines, FAFSAs, and making a decision that will likely affect them for the remainder of their lives. To make these life-altering choices, students must spend hours scouring the internet or marketing materials for pieces of information like tuition price,

size of school, distance from home, and scholarships available along with their respective eligibility requirements. Oftentimes these critical pieces of information are found three or more levels deep on a website and in a different location on each individual college's site (Figure 2.).

Figure 2. Beginning from a school's homepage, below is a demonstration of the unique path, and the number of mouse clicks necessary to find out how many students are enrolled in that institution.

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

Click ABOUT WVU

Click WVU FACTS

Scroll part way down the page

BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Click ABOUT BLUE RIDGE

Click OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Click FALL 2012 ENROLLMENT

SALEM INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

The author was unable to find any listing of current or recent enrollment numbers at www.salemu.edu.

Gender	Female	Male	Total
Total	3,024	4,028	7,052

PDF document automatically launches

In their book *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, behavioral scientist Richard Thaler and Harvard professor of law Cass Sunstein theorize that the average person would benefit from guidance—in the form of clearly articulated options—for decisions that are “difficult and rare, for which they do not get prompt feedback, and when they have trouble translating aspects of the situation into terms that they can easily understand.” (Thaler 2009) Deciding on a post-secondary school path certainly fits that description. Selecting a college for the first time is a decision that only happens once in an individual’s lifetime, feedback from that decision may not materialize until years after a student has completed college, and determining aspects like the tuition one can afford to repay through loans is likely to be a concept altogether foreign to teenagers who may not even have bank accounts. Thaler and Sunstein call providing this guidance a *nudge* and advocate giving nudges in the form of improved choice architecture:

A good system of choice architecture helps people to improve their ability to map and hence to select options that will make them better off. One way to do this is to make the information about various options more comprehensible, by transforming numerical information into units that translate more readily into actual use. (Thaler 2009)

Consider the simple example of tuition prices. While this is one of the easiest pieces of information for prospective students to find, some colleges list a tuition price that represents a full school year (not including summer), some list a price that represents only one semester, some list quarter prices, some list price-by-credit hour, and some list a combination of semester and credit hour prices. In a few instances, schools will list tuition and fees as a single number, while others list only the tuition price and additional fees are charged separately. This makes comparing schools difficult without doing some math and paying close attention to details.

It is true that a host of tools and websites exist that allow a student to compare colleges across the nation based on statistics like cost, graduation rate, student-to-faculty ratio and other standardized data. However, there is no all-in-one tool to help students evaluate and compare West Virginia colleges specifically, and in a way that is both fair and in terms or a context that teen students relate to. If data about West Virginia college options were easier to compare and understand, high school students in the state could be better equipped to choose a college that best fits their unique situation. Students would be less likely to attend a college that is not a good match, and less likely to miss out on the opportunity to attend college simply because they were ill-informed about their options.

While poorly executed choice architecture puts all students at a disadvantage, it likely has a disproportionate effect on students from underprivileged backgrounds. Attending college and earning a degree has the potential to be the single, most impactful accomplishment a disadvantaged student has of escaping poverty, yet poor architecture hurts their chances of even getting there. Thaler and Sunstein agree, saying, “when markets get more complicated, unsophisticated and uneducated shoppers will be especially disadvantaged by the complexity.” (Thaler 2009)

The goal of this project was to aid West Virginia high school students in choosing a college by applying and adapting Thaler and Sunstein’s theories for an audience significantly younger than the trial groups outlined in *Nudge* and subsequent experiments. It is my belief that presenting data about each of West Virginia’s forty-one higher education institutions in a visual, infographic format will help high school juniors evaluate and compare their post-secondary options and select a school that is the best fit for their individual situation and need in the same way that Thaler and Sunstein’s experiments helped make credit card fees more comprehensible to adult customers (Thaler 2009).

Converting decision-making data like cost of attendance, size and enrollment, and number of programs of study into infographics will restructure the information architecture by: bringing together scattered pieces of information into a central location; allowing for direct comparison of all options; and structuring information in a visual and verbal format that students relate to. This restructuring will help students move through the knowledge pyramid (figure 3) by analyzing data, converting it to information, and then building knowledge by giving that information context. The result of this redesigned choice architecture will be that students can more effectively navigate the West Virginia college search and application process and end up in colleges best suited to their needs. Reduced complexity would open the door for more students to make the transition from high school to college, potentially leading to long-ranging socio-economic impacts on the state by way of a workforce better prepared to meet the requirements for higher paying jobs.

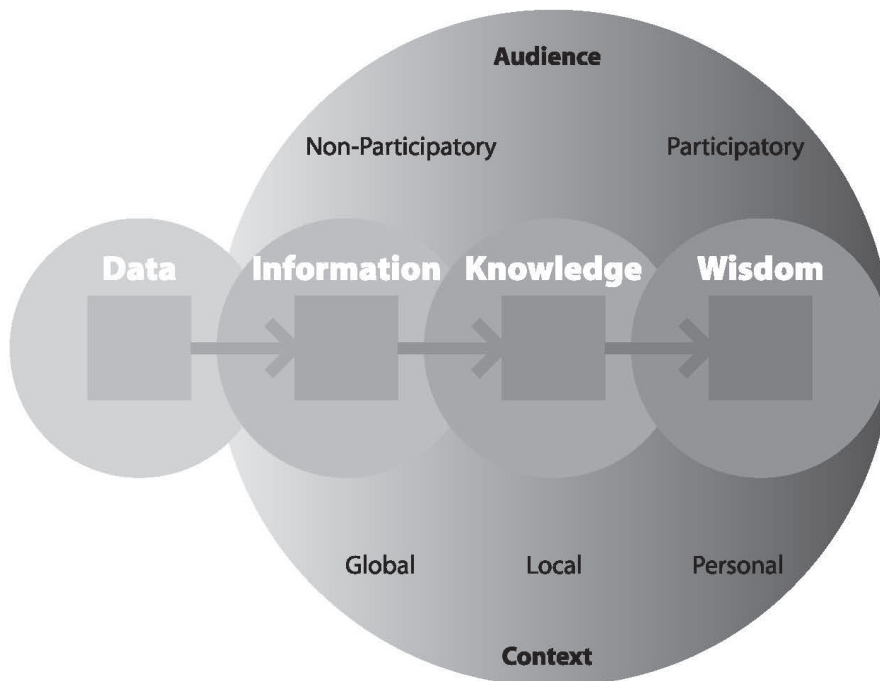


Figure 3. The Data, Information, Knowledge, Wisdom (DIKW) pyramid interpreted as a continuum by Nathan Shedroff. (Shedroff 1994).

STRUCTURING THE CHOICE TASK

Central to choice architecture is selecting the number of options to present to decision makers. While it is widely recognized that too many options can overwhelm a user and then stifle decision-making, it is critical to include all viable options so as to avoid creating bias. In the case of West Virginia colleges, it was discovered that forty-one institutions grant either Associate or Baccalaureate degrees (table 1). Despite the fact that there is a wide range of quality among those particular institutions, it was important to include all as possibilities for West Virginia students seeking a degree. Other institutions that offered only certificates or only graduate degrees were excluded from the project so as not to dilute the options that were most relevant to students seeking a college degree.

In the paper titled “Beyond Nudges: Tools of a choice architecture,” Eric J. Johnson and his team posit that there are two categories of tools available to choice architects: those for structuring the choice task (*what* to present) and for describing the choice options (*how* to present).

[...] the choice architect needs to balance two criteria: first that more options increase the chances of offering a preference match to the consumer, and second that more options places a greater cognitive burden on consumers because of the additional need to evaluate options. Thus, to answer this question of balance, we should be concerned about the willingness of the decision-maker to engage in the choice process, the decision-maker's satisfaction with the decision process, and more generally the nature of the processes that will be used to make the decision. (Johnson 2013)

Table 1. Basic information for each of West Virginia's forty-one Associate and Baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. Cost, enrollment, and degree data from the National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator (U.S. Department of Education 2014), all other information from individual college websites.

INSTITUTION NAME	ADDRESS	CITY	WEBSITE	PUBLIC/P RIVATE	TYPE	DEGREES OFFERED	TUITION (2012-13 or 24 credit hrs)	ROOM & BOARD (2012-13)	STUDENT POPULATION
Alderson Broaddus College	101 College Park Dr	Philippi	www.ab.edu	Private	4 year	A B	\$22,740.00	\$7,236.00	826
American Public University System	N. George St.	Charles Town	www.apus.edu	Private for-profit	4 year	A B	\$6,400.00	none	58,115
Appalachian Bible College	161 College Dr	Mount Hope	www.abc.edu	Private	4 year	A B	\$12,680.00	\$6,570.00	302
Bethany College	1 Main Street	Bethany	www.bethanywv.edu	Private	4 year	B	\$24,780.00	\$9,546.00	842
Blue Ridge Community and Technical College	13650 Apple Harvest Drive	Martinsburg	www.blueridgectc.edu	Public	2 year	A	\$3,120.00	none	4,360
Bluefield State College	219 Rock Street	Bluefield	www.bluefieldstate.edu/	Public	4 year	A B	\$5,180.00	none	1,935
Bridgemont Community and Technical College	619 2nd Avenue	Montgomery	www.bridgemont.edu	Public	2 year	A	\$3,934.00	\$3,793.00	1,070
Concord University	Vermillion Street PO Box 10	Athens	www.concord.edu/	Public	4 year	A B	\$5,716.00	\$7,386.00	2,834
Davis & Elkins College	100 Campus Drive	Elkins	www.dewv.edu	Private	4 year	A B	\$23,820.00	\$8,350.00	818
Eastern Community and Technical College	316 Eastern Drive	Moorefield	www.easternwv.edu	Public	2 year	A	\$2,424.00	none	822
Fairmont State University	1201 Locust Avenue	Fairmont	www.fairmontstate.edu/	Public	4 year	A B	\$5,326.00	\$7,420.00	4,451
Glenville State College	200 High Street	Glenville	www.glenville.edu/	Public	4 year	A B	\$5,860.00	\$8,810.00	1,898
Huntington Junior College	900 Fifth Avenue	Huntington	www.huntingtonjuniorcollege.edu	Private for-profit	2 year	A	\$7,485.00	none	802
ITT Technical Institute - Huntington	5183 US Route 60, Building	Huntington	www.itt-tech.edu	Private for-profit	2 year	A	\$18,048.00	none	348
Kanawha Valley Community and Technical College	2001 Union Carbide Drive	South Charleston	www.kvctc.edu	Public	2 year	A	\$3,236.00	none	1,578
Marshall University	One John Marshall Drive	Huntington	www.marshall.edu/	Public	4 year	A B	\$5,930.00	\$8,988.00	13,708
Mountain State College	1508 Spring Street	Parkersburg	www.msc.edu	Private for-profit	2 year	A	\$8,215.00	none	153
Mountwest Community and Technical College	One Mountwest Way	Huntington	www.mctc.edu	Public	2 year	A	\$2,952.00	none	2,608
New River Community and Technical College	221 George Street, Suite 2	Beckley	www.newriver.edu	Public	2 year	A	\$3,234.00	none	2,857
Ohio Valley University	1 Campus View Drive	Vienna	www.ovu.edu	Private	4 year	A B	\$18,100.00	\$6,676.00	478
Pierpont Community and Technical College	1201 Locust Avenue	Fairmont	www.pierpont.edu	Public	2 year	A	\$3,860.00	\$7,420.00	2,925
Potomac State College of WVU	101 Fort Avenue	Keyser	www.potomacstatecollege.edu	Public	4 year	A B	\$3,178.00	\$7,520.00	1,781
Salem International University	223 W. Main Street	Salem	www.salemu.edu	Private for-profit	4 year	A B	\$16,350.00	\$6,400.00	850
Shepherd University	PO Box 5000	Shepherdstown	www.shepherd.edu/	Public	4 year	B	\$5,834.00	\$8,854.00	4,326
Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College	PO Box 2900, 2900 Dempse	Mount Gay	www.southernwv.edu	Public	2 year	A	\$2,520.00	none	2,178
Strayer University - West Virginia	100 Corporate Center Dr	Scott Depot	www.strayer.edu/west-virginia	Private for-profit	4 year	A B	\$14,904.00	none	220
University of Charleston	2300 Maccorkle Avenue SE	Charleston	www.ucwv.edu	Private	4 year	A B	\$19,681.00	\$9,000.00	1,427
Valley College - Beckley	120 New River Town Center	Beckley	www.valley.edu	Private for-profit	2 year	A	\$16,025.00	none	163
Valley College - Martinsburg	287 Aikens Ctr Edwin Miller	Martinsburg	www.valley.edu	Private for-profit	2 year	A	\$11,300.00	none	77
West Liberty University	PO Box 295	West Liberty	www.westliberty.edu/	Public	4 year	A B	\$5,530.00	\$8,200.00	2,804
West Virginia Business College	1052 Main Street	Wheeling	www.wvbc.edu	Private for-profit	2 year	A	\$9,150.00	none	93
West Virginia Junior College - Bridgeport	176 Thompson Dr	Bridgeport	www.wvjc.edu	Private for-profit	2 year	A	\$11,825.00	none	229
West Virginia Junior College - Charleston	1000 Virginia St E	Charleston	www.wvjc.edu	Private for-profit	2 year	A	\$11,800.00	none	206
West Virginia Junior College - Morgantown	148 Willey St	Morgantown	www.wvjc.edu	Private for-profit	2 year	A	\$13,152.00	none	226
West Virginia Northern Community College	1704 Market Street	Wheeling	www.wvncc.edu	Public	2 year	A	\$2,646.00	none	2,505
West Virginia State University	PO Box 1000	Institute	www.wvstateu.edu/	Public	4 year	B	\$5,442.00	\$6,698.00	2,644
West Virginia University	PO Box 6201	Morgantown	www.wvu.edu/	Public	4 year	B	\$6,090.00	\$8,508.00	29,707
West Virginia Wesleyan College	59 College Avenue	Buckhannon	www.wvwc.edu	Private	4 year	B	\$25,804.00	\$7,510.00	1,394
Wheeling Jesuit University	316 Washington Avenue	Wheeling	www.wju.edu	Private	4 year	B	\$25,640.00	\$9,028.00	1,549
WVU Institute of Technology	405 Fayette Pike	Montgomery	www.wvutech.edu/	Public	4 year	B	\$5,558.00	\$8,176.00	1,107
WVU Parkersburg	300 Campus Drive	Parkersburg	www.wvup.edu	Public	4 year	A B	\$2,496.00	none	3,824

By providing a decision-making process that allowed students to quickly filter schools in stages based on a small selection of criteria, the project minimizes the “cognitive burden” that forty-one options would otherwise create. In order to determine what these filters should be to best serve the students, three design methods were initially used to gauge the thoughts, perceptions, and desires of the target audience.

Survey. A self-completed questionnaire was administered to fifty-five eleventh grade students at Gilmer County High School (figure 4).

Focus Group. Drawn from the same population of students who were surveyed, twenty eleventh grade students also participated in a follow-up focus group to provide additional insight into the level of understanding students have concerning the college search and application process.

Card Sort. The twenty students in the focus group were partnered up to complete a card sort. Students were asked to sort the cards that contained ten different criteria that could be used to determine interest in a college, from most important (#1) to least important (#10) (table 2).


From these three methods, many important insights were gained that guided the creation of the final product. For example, the questionnaire revealed that students consider major, cost, and a school’s distance from home to be very important factors when choosing a college (#2). While qualitative feedback from the focus group revealed that many students start their search using Google or a similar search engine, the questionnaire indicates that many students start their search using the websites of individual schools (#3). And while the questionnaire illustrates that most of the students seemed to have a good understanding of when selected preparatory tasks should take place (#4), discussion in the focus group revealed their desire for a more clearly defined timeline, particularly a starting point.

Figure 4. Survey administered to Gilmer County High School juniors with recorded responses.

THANK YOU for taking a few minutes to complete this survey, which is being conducted by West Virginia University College of Creative Arts graduate students and faculty. Your feedback is important in helping us design tools that will make choosing a college easier.

This survey should only take about five minutes of your time. Your answers will be completely anonymous, please do not write your name on your survey.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact us at lindsey.estep@mail.wvu.edu or call 304-293-2552.

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COLLEGE OF CREATIVE ARTS

55 responses 1. Higher education institutions (we'll call them "college" from here on) are schools that provide a degree beyond a high school diploma. These degrees could include Associate degree, Baccalaureate (Bachelor) degree, Master degree, etc.
Do you want to attend college? (circle one)

YES NO I DON'T KNOW 1 student did not answer this question

*If you answered "NO" to question 1, please skip to question 6.
If you answered "YES" or "I DON'T KNOW" to question 1, please continue to questions 2-6.*

Figure 4. (continued)

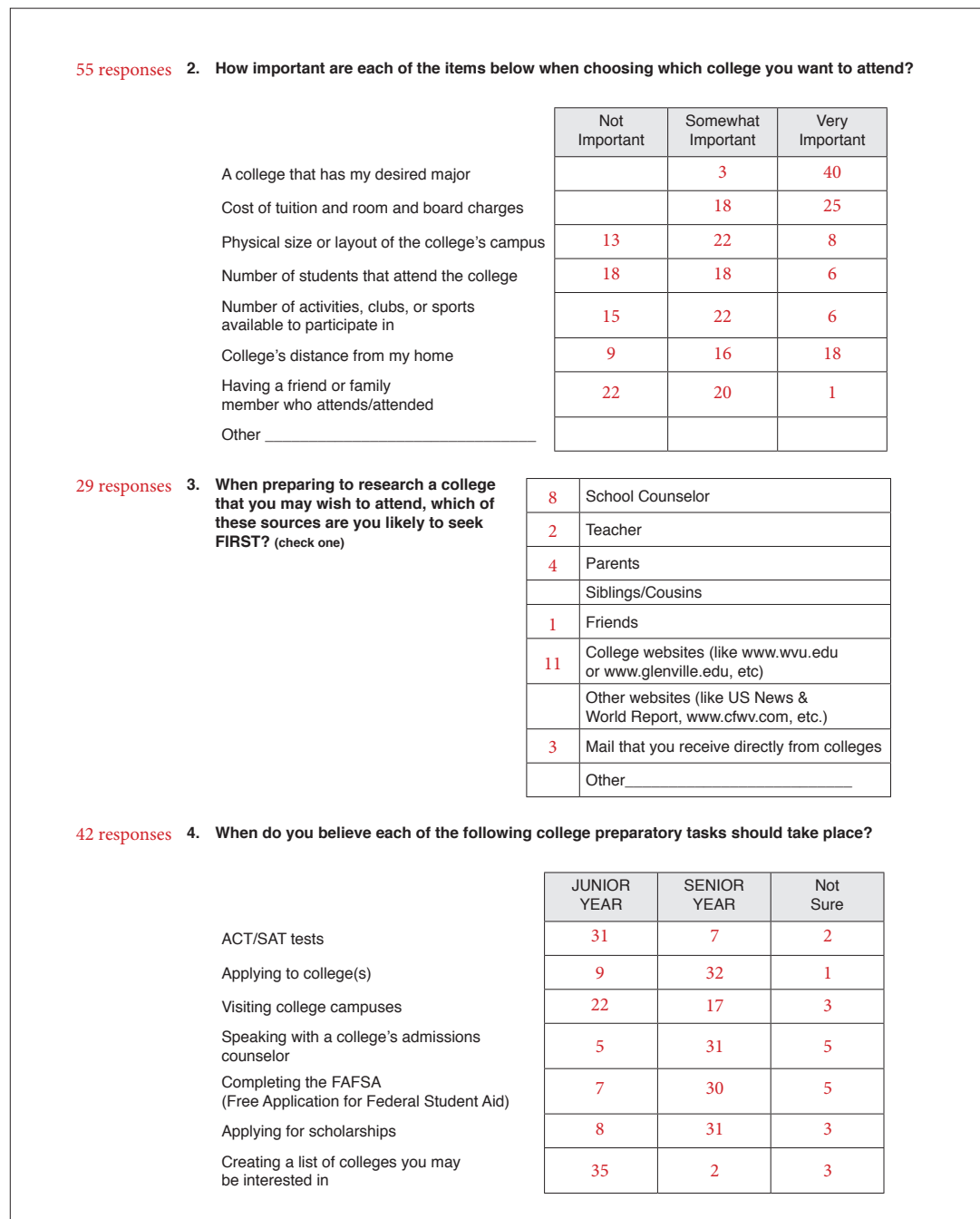


Figure 4. (continued)

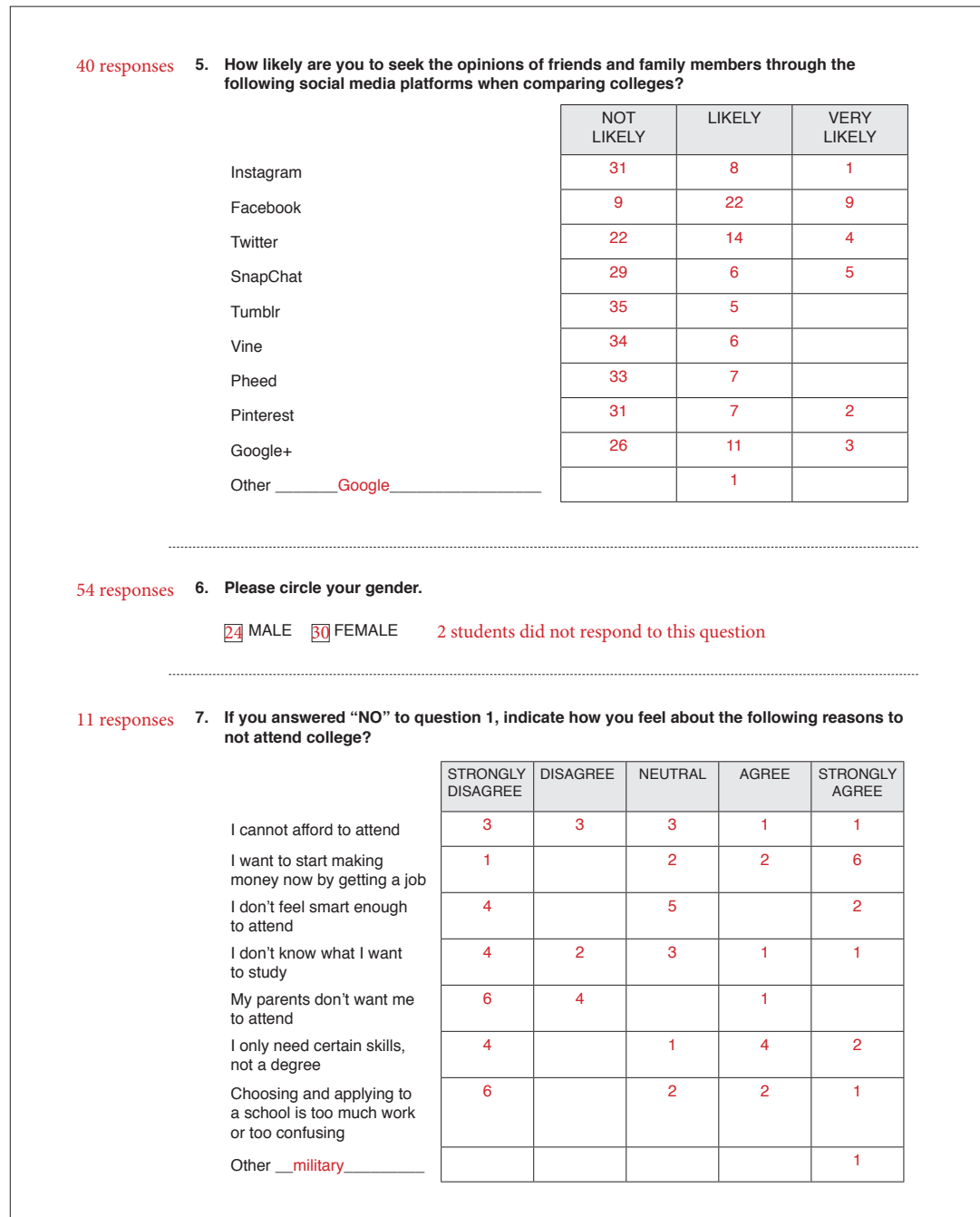


Table 2. Card sort results. Ten sets of partners ranked decision-making criteria from #1 most important to #10 least important.

TEAM 1		TEAM 2		TEAM 3		TEAM 4	
1	MAJOR(S)	1	MAJOR(S)	1	MAJOR(S)	1	MAJOR(S)
2	COST OF ATTENDANCE	2	STUDENT POPULATION	2	COST OF ATTENDANCE	2	COST OF ATTENDANCE
3	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL	3	PARENT(S) OPINION	3	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER	3	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER
4	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER	4	COST OF ATTENDANCE	4	PARENT(S) OPINION	4	SCHOOL REPUTATION
5	STUDENT POPULATION	5	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER	5	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL	5	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL
6	PARENT(S) OPINION	6	SPORTS TEAMS	6	SPORTS TEAMS	6	PARENT(S) OPINION
7	SCHOOL REPUTATION	7	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL	7	SCHOOL REPUTATION	7	STUDENT POPULATION
8	SPORTS TEAMS	8	SCHOOL REPUTATION	8	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES	8	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES
9	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES	9	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS	9	STUDENT POPULATION	9	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS
10	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS	10	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES	10	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS	10	SPORTS TEAMS
TEAM 5		TEAM 6		TEAM 7		TEAM 8	
1	MAJOR(S)	1	MAJOR(S)	1	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER	1	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER
2	COST OF ATTENDANCE	2	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL	2	COST OF ATTENDANCE	2	COST OF ATTENDANCE
3	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER	3	COST OF ATTENDANCE	3	MAJOR(S)	3	MAJOR(S)
4	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL	4	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER	4	STUDENT POPULATION	4	STUDENT POPULATION
5	PARENT(S) OPINION	5	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES	5	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL	5	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL
6	SCHOOL REPUTATION	6	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS	6	PARENT(S) OPINION	6	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS
7	STUDENT POPULATION	7	SPORTS TEAMS	7	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS	7	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES
8	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES	8	SCHOOL REPUTATION	8	SCHOOL REPUTATION	8	PARENT(S) OPINION
9	SPORTS TEAMS	9	STUDENT POPULATION	9	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES	9	SCHOOL REPUTATION
10	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS	10	PARENT(S) OPINION	10	SPORTS TEAMS	10	SPORTS TEAMS
TEAM 9		TEAM 10		TOTALS			
1	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER	1	SPORTS TEAMS	17	MAJORS	59	PARENT(S) OPINION
2	MAJOR(S)	2	COST OF ATTENDANCE	24	COST OF ATTENDANCE	71	SCHOOL REPUTATION
3	COST OF ATTENDANCE	3	MAJOR(S)	30	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER	77	SPORTS TEAMS
4	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL	4	PARENT(S) OPINIONS	46	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL	82	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES
5	STUDENT POPULATION	5	SCHOLARSHIP OFFER	59	STUDENT POPULATION	85	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS
6	SCHOOL REPUTATION	6	LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL				
7	PARENT(S) OPINION	7	STUDENT POPULATION				
8	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS	8	SCHOOL REPUTATION				
9	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES	9	CLUBS & ACTIVITIES				
10	SPORTS TEAMS	10	I KNOW OTHER STUDENTS				

RESULTS
Criteria with the lowest scores are most important to students.

In early stages of the project, an idea surfaced to provide students with prompts to interact and share their search process through social media as a way to collect input and encouragement from friends, family, and potentially, alumni from the schools that the student was considering. It is no secret that teenagers widely use social media as a way of documenting their experiences, and many articles claim that teens are gravitating away from Facebook and towards Instagram and Twitter to do this sharing. (Madden 2013) The questionnaire administered to the Gilmer County High School students however, did not necessarily support these claims, and did not indicate that teens would be willing to share an experience like trying to select a college through social media channels. Further questioning in the focus group found that, while students were open to the idea of sharing positive reports (e.g. winning a scholarship, being accepted to a desired school, or making a final decision as to which school to attend), the majority of students expressed a distaste for taking to social media to openly ask for opinions.



Students complete the college selection criteria card sort activity.

DESCRIBING THE CHOICE OPTIONS

In order to embrace the role of choice architect, it is not enough to simply gather the information to present to decision makers. Great care must be exercised to ensure that the information is presented in a way that those decision makers—particularly those in the greatest need for guidance—can draw insight from in order to reach the solution that will be most beneficial to their future. This is what Johnson et al considered the second set of tools available to choice architects, and also where designers have the greatest ability to guide the decision makers along the path of complex determinations like which college to attend.

Because the college selection process is at least somewhat dependent on and intertwined with the college application process, it is not sufficient to present only standardized data about the forty-one institutions in West Virginia and expect students to make a choice that leads to a better outcome than the one they would have made on their own. To that end, it was decided that presenting the decision-making criteria within the context of a guide for the entire application process would best meet students' needs. In addition to the comparison information, the guide would highlight important resources and deadlines across the board in order to maximize students' chances of completing necessary tasks on-time, leading to better financial aid and placement opportunities in the college of their choice.

The final format chosen was a mini-folder that contained a guide booklet in one pocket and a series of cards containing infographics of the decision-making criteria in the other pocket. This format allows for a reader-driven experience where the student can use the tools in a non-linear fashion based on where they are in their individual search or decision process, or based on the criteria they feel more strongly about. The project was titled "*DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision: Find your own path through the WV college*

search and application process!” The infographic tools for decision-making were chosen based on student responses from the survey and focus group discussion: location and size, cost, type of degree offered, and majors. (See Appendix A for images of the booklet and cards.)

Most important to the decision of how to present the data was ensuring that students could compare schools side-by-side on equal scales and in terms that were understandable and relatable to the audience. This decision is in the spirit of Thaler and Sunstein’s RECAP: Record, Evaluate, and Compare Alternative Prices model of disclosure and transparency (Thaler 2009). One of the first major decisions in describing the choice options was to categorize the colleges based on whether they were privately funded or publicly funded, and based on what type of degree, Associate or Baccalaureate, they awarded (although there was some overlap in four year schools that also award a select number of Associate degrees). These distinctions were important in helping to illustrate the value proposition (what one gets vs. what one pays) to students, particularly to disadvantaged students. Johnson discusses this partitioning of the choice options and confirms, “partitioning will tend to exert the strongest paternalistic influence on those who need the greatest guidance and will have the weakest effect on those who require the least guidance.” (Johnson 2013)

In addition to partitioning the data, each of the decision-making tools utilizes narrative elements to guide the viewer through the data while also addressing important outliers and relationships. While some elements of a story are provided as an introduction into the data for each individual tool, the visualizations are still created in a way to allow for self-discovery and exploration. They are not, however, without subtle nudges from the designer. In their research of visual narratives, authors Edward Segel and Jeffrey Heer explore the ways that one might direct a viewer’s attention:

Of course, not all elements in a scene are of equal importance throughout a story, and so authors often manipulate a scene to direct attention to a point of interest. Psychologists have extensively studied phenomena of visual salience, showing that outliers among visual features such as color, size, and orientation preferentially attract one's attention. (Segel 2010)

In some cases this attention may need to be minimized. For example, in the location and size data visualization (figure 5), students will likely recognize that American Public University Systems is the largest institution in the state, by several thousand students no less. What is not readily obvious from the data set, is that the school delivers a strictly online education and, while they do maintain a physical campus, APUS does not have a traditional campus or university setting. A special callout was included to bring this information to students' attention and minimize the perceived size of the school before making a decision about that particular school. In contrast, a special callout was created on the tuition price graphic (figure 6) to maximize a relationship that students may not immediately perceive. The bar graph illustrates that the majority of West Virginia's four-year public institutions charge tuition that differs by \$1,000 per year or less. The annotation highlights this fact so that students considering those schools will be discouraged from making a decision based mainly on price, but would instead look to other factors or indicators of quality.

Figure 5. Location and size infographic decision-making tool.

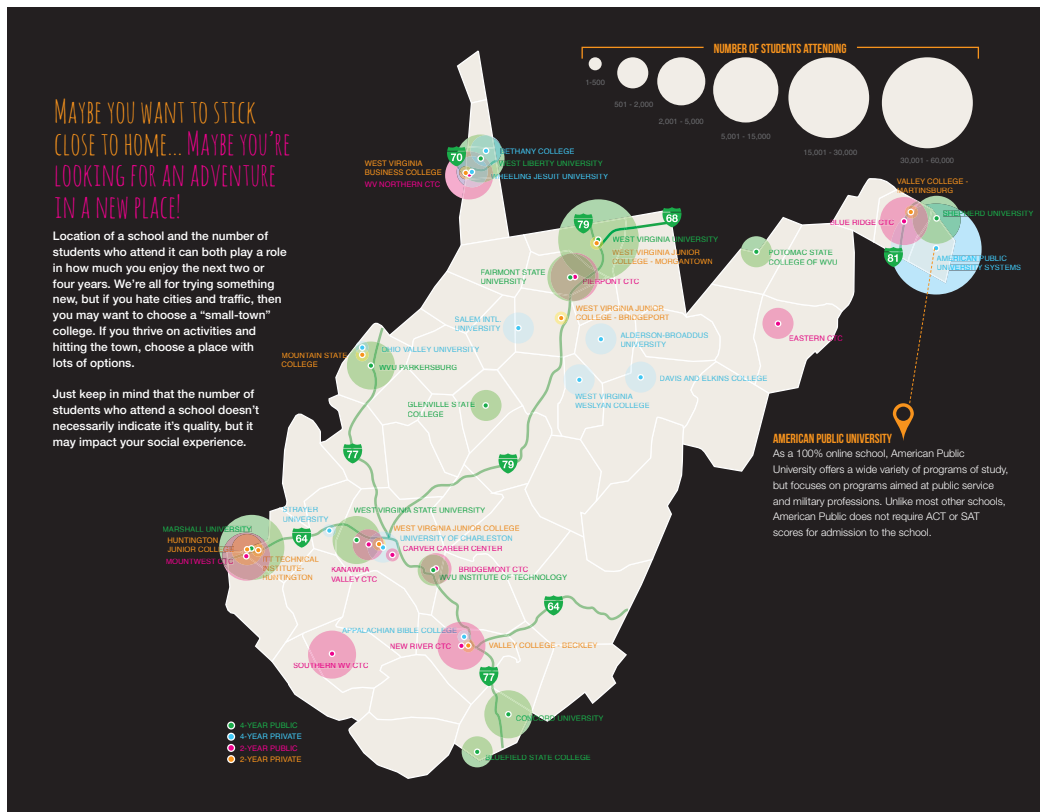
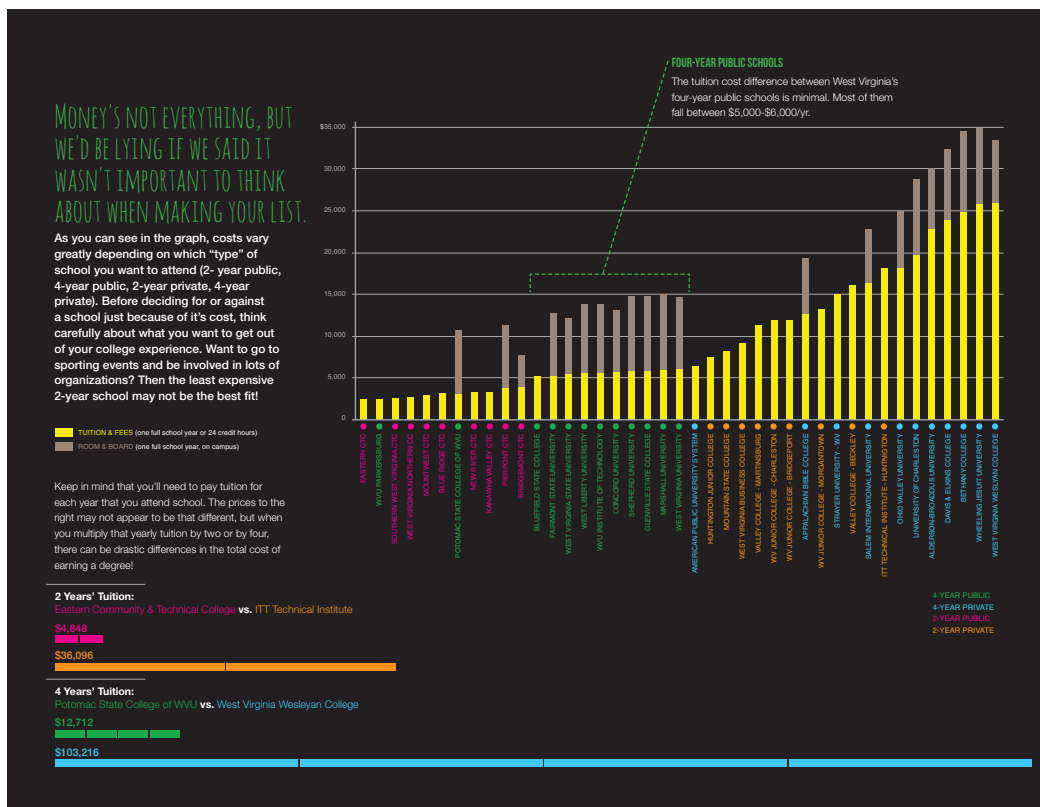


Figure 6. Cost infographic decision-making tool.



GOING BACK TO HIGH SCHOOL

To be certain that the college decision data being presented was understandable to the target audience, the group of twenty eleventh grade students who were part of the focus group also participated in A/B testing—a tool used to optimize designs to generate a desired response from an audience—for one of the data visualization designs. Students were presented two different designs (figure 7) representing the same information and then asked to complete tasks to ensure they had the capability to extract relevant information from the graphic.

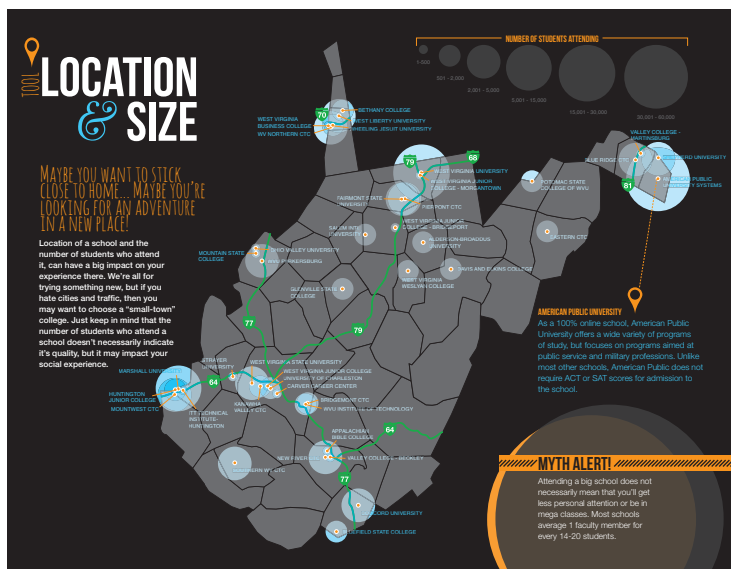
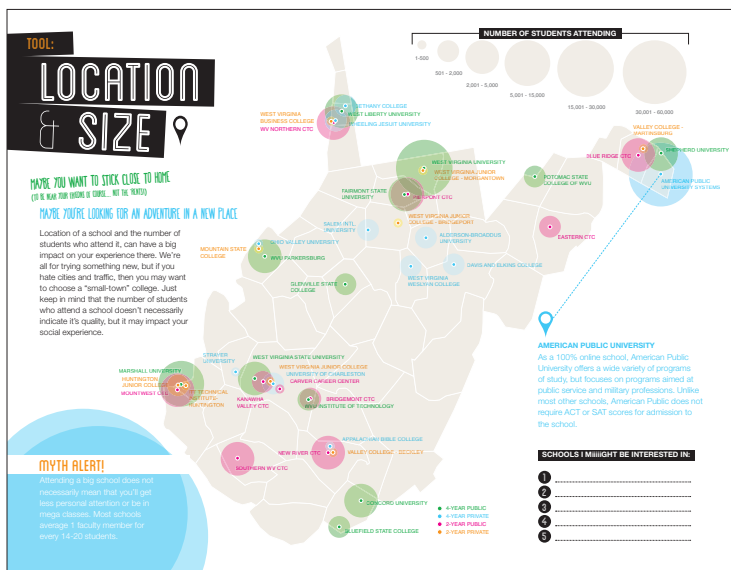



Figure 7. Two versions of the location and size infographic decision-making tool for A/B testing.

Each student was also given a follow-up questionnaire to provide qualitative feedback about each design (figure 8). This feedback was then adapted and applied to the other graphic tools contained within the project.

**GILMER COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL
FOCUS GROUP DESIGN SURVEY**



1. Look at the white design. If you were interested in going to a **public, four-year college** that had **2,000 students or less**, what would be one of your options? (*Hint: there are four options that meet that criteria, just list one.*)

One student (out of 21) answered incorrectly.

2. Using the black design, list the three colleges that have the largest number of students in WV. (*list in any order*)
 - 1- One student (out of 21) answered incorrectly.
 - 2-
 - 3-

3. Is one map easier to understand? If so, which map is easier, and why?

WHITE - 14 votes Students seemed to prefer the color coding and having the additional
BLACK - 5 votes information about school types. Some commented that the black map was
NEITHER - 2 votes easier to read, and liked having the major routes shown.

4. If you were searching for a college right now, how helpful is it to be able to compare the following criteria about each college in West Virginia

	Not Helpful	Neutral	Somewhat Helpful	Very Helpful
where colleges are located in the state		1	8	12
number of students that attend each college		2	8	11
whether a college is public or private		2	5	14
whether a college is 2-year or 4-year		2	4	14

5. If the design had a place for you to make personal notes or write down schools you were interested in (*similar to the block in the lower right corner of the white design*), how likely would you be to fill in that area?

NOT LIKELY NEUTRAL SOMEWHAT LIKELY VERY LIKELY

6. Based only on looks, do you prefer the white design or the black design? Why?

WHITE - 16 votes
BLACK - 15 votes

7. If this map tool was combined with other tools and information designed to help you compare schools and make your college decision easier, which title and tagline do you think we should use for the project?
 - College Insta-Compare:** *Your total guide to comparing WV colleges, surviving the application process, and Instagramming the whole experience!*
 - College Compare Fair:** *Forget the free pens and bubbly admissions counselor. This DIY "College Fair" has the info you really need to choose a WV college and survive the application process!*
 - DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision:** *Find your own path through the WV college selection and application process!*

THANK YOU for participating! We'd love to hear your thoughts. If you would like to provide any additional comments about either design, please do so on the back of this sheet.
"I like that the black one includes the interstates. I think it makes it easier to visualize the location."

Figure 8. Questionnaire that accompanied the A/B test images, and the tallied results of that questionnaire.

Teenagers are a highly discriminating audience. With companies vying for their attention daily through both print and digital media, landing on a look and tone for the final project where equal consideration was given to information to present and how best to present it was critical. A childish tone would make the project fodder for ridicule, while a look or tone too stiff and formal could be perceived as advertising or paternalism. Either way, it would be impossible for the project to achieve its goal without finding the appropriate middle ground. An extensive survey conducted by Piper Jaffray into the habits and preferences of teens pointed to the brands and companies that teenagers are most attracted to and trends that are taking shape among teen buyers (Piper Jaffray 2013).

After visiting the respective websites and looking at advertising for many of the popular brands, aesthetic and tonal preferences were deduced and then adapted for the final writing and design of this project. Common design themes among those desired brands included: use of bold sans serif typefaces; frequent use of hand rendered typefaces; combinations of bright, highly saturated colors; use of bold geometric objects; and use of a casual tone that remained gender-neutral (figure 9). In addition to these considerations, the inclusions of other common experiences in the life of a teenager (e.g. writing a junior research paper, escaping one's parents, anticipating junior prom) were placed throughout the narrative to keep the content relatable and engaging.

A final consideration in how best to present this visual narrative to a teenage audience was the production vehicle or medium. Although an interactive website or application could have allowed for more powerful discoveries in the data by the students themselves, those media could also potentially introduce a barrier to entry for disadvantaged students or those with limited access to high-speed internet. It was important that every single student have easy access, in the environment of their choosing, to read and study the content of the project. It is hoped that the physical presence of the materials

will be a more ready reminder and prompt than a virtual environment would provide. In order to introduce an element of interactivity in an analog medium such as print, students are provided with prompts to begin building their list of potential schools as they use the decision-making tools. The creation of multiple short lists over the course of the project allows the student to see regularities among their schools of interest in order to better inform their final decision.

Figure 9. Websites and advertisements from teens favorite brands, and layouts from popular magazines that inspired many of the design choices for this project.

LIFE 3 WAYS TO ... MAKE YOUR FRIDAY NIGHT FUN! • SO ... ARE YOU A FEMINIST? • SURVIVE ANY AWKWARD SITCH! • MAKE \$\$\$ WITH YOUR PHONE! • 3 WA

SURVIVE ANY AWKWARD SITCH!

seventeen CAMPUS MVPs

College life is filled with post-hookup run-ins and classroom fails, so follow Tiffany's stay-cool tips for any mess you find yourself in.

THE SITCH: YOU HAVE A MAJOR WARDROBE FAIL IN THE CAF

“ I couldn't sleep, so at 5 A.M., I headed to the dining hall for coffee. I figured the whole campus would be asleep, so I didn't even bother getting dressed. I walked in with my fuzzy slippers and pj's on . . . only to see the lacrosse team (including my crush!) having a prep practice breakfast. Instead of bolting, I pretended nothing was weird. Sometimes if you don't act like things are a big deal, they won't be. ”

THE SITCH: YOU STARTED SLEEP-TALKING . . . IN THE LIBRARY

“ After studying for hours, I dozed off in the library. Suddenly, this guy shook me awake because I was talking in my sleep—it was mortifying! But what could I really do? You just have to own it! So I apologized, did a lap around the building to stretch, and found another place to sit. There's no way I could have concentrated knowing the cutie I had just embarrassed myself in front of was a few feet away. ”

THE SITCH: YOU ATE IT—IN FRONT OF THE ENTIRE CLASS

“ My most humiliating moment ever? I sat down in my history class and the chair broke. It was an old rickety chair, but still! I felt like a legit idiot lying on the floor with everyone laughing. But rather than getting upset, I joined in on the joke by saying, 'Well, I guess I'll just stand.' Being part of the laughter turned 'OMG!' into 'LOL.' ”

THE SITCH: LAST NIGHT'S KISS LANDED ON THE COLLEGE MAKEOUT TWITTER ACCOUNT

“ It's easy to get caught up with a hot guy and have an epic PDA moment. But when you wake up the next day to see that someone posted your makeout on Twitter? Ugh. My strategy: Tweet random things at the makeout handle, so it pushes the tweet with your pic farther and farther down. ”

WATCH A VIDEO! Get the best advice for dealing with dorm life from our College MVPs at moodle.seventeen.com

184 SEVENTEEN.COM / APRIL 2014

Magazine page from *Seventeen* April 2014. Inspiration: tone, hand-rendered typography

MATERIAL GIRL

only macy's

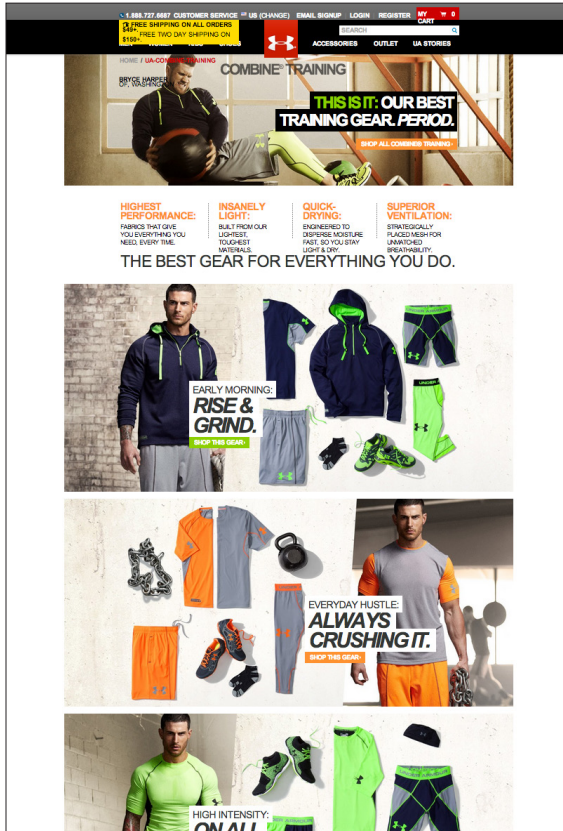
CREATED BY THE ORIGINAL MATERIAL GIRL, MADONNA & HER DAUGHTER, LOLA

macys.com/materialgirl f/materialgirl @materialgirl

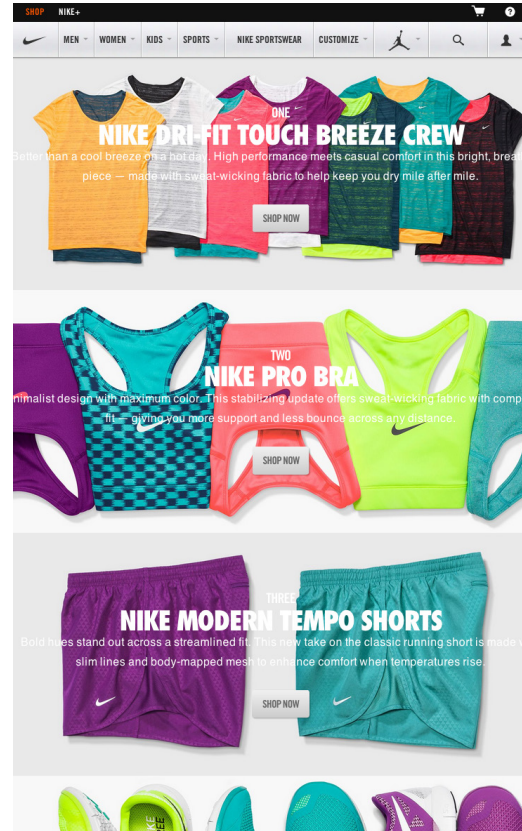
macy's

Macy's advertisement from *Teen Vogue* April 2014. Inspiration: black with bright color, geometric elements

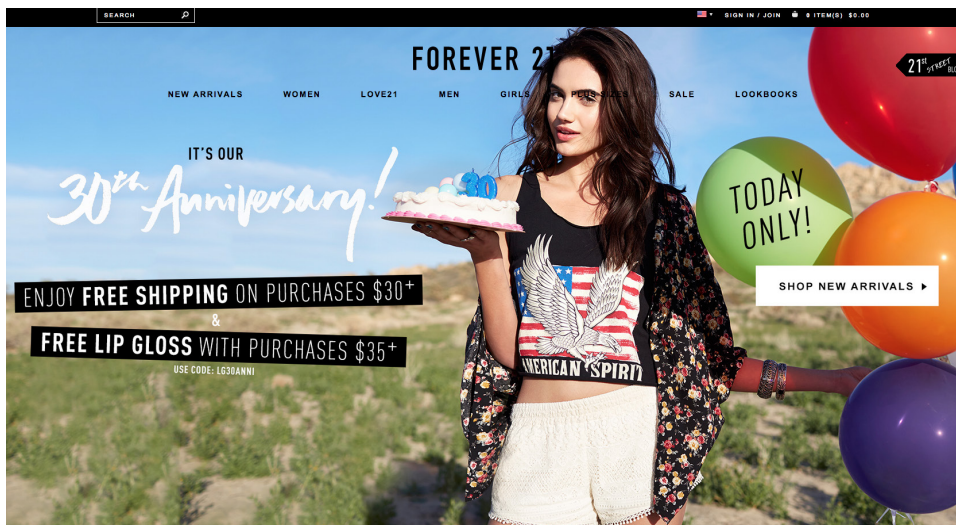
Figure 9. (continued)



Screenshot from www.underarmour.com, April 2014.
Inspiration: bright, saturated colors, bold sans serif type



Screenshot from www.nike.com, April 2014.
Inspiration: bright, saturated colors, bold sans serif type



Screenshot from www.forever21.com, April 2014.
Inspiration: black with bright color, geometric elements, hand-rendered typography

CONCLUSION

By converting college search decision-making data that students are most concerned with—such as cost of attendance, size and enrollment, and majors—into infographics, and then framing the decision with a narrative and gentle nudges, the *DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision* has restructured the information architecture of a major decision faced by teenagers. The project brings together scattered pieces of *data* into a central location which allows for direct comparison of all undergraduate degree-granting college options to convert that data to *information*. By providing context for that information in a visual and verbal format that students relate, the project helps students convert that information into *knowledge*. Ultimately, students are escorted through the knowledge pyramid in order to gain wisdom to make a decision that will most beneficial to their future. Renowned design strategist Nathan Shedroff explains the value of each stage of this continuum (figure 10):

Data is fairly worthless to most of us; it is the product of research or creation (such as writing), but it is not an adequate product for communicating. To have information value, it must be organized, transformed, and presented in a way that gives it meaning. Information is also not the end of the continuum of understanding. Just as data can be transformed into meaningful information, so can information be transformed into knowledge and, further, into wisdom. Knowledge is a phenomenon that we can build for others just as we can build information for others from data. This is done through Interaction Design and the creation of experiences. [...] We should always make [knowledge] our goal because it allows the most valuable messages to be conveyed. It is also the last level that we can directly effect[.] (Shedroff 1994)

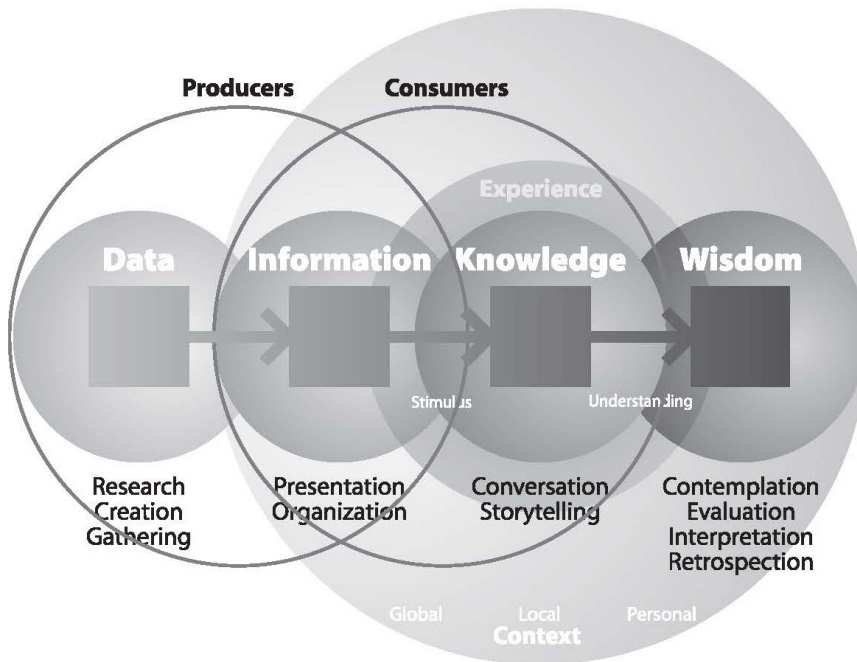


Figure 10. An annotated Data, Information, Knowledge, Wisdom (DIKW) continuum by Nathan Shedroff. (Shedroff 1994).

Prior to this project, West Virginia students could certainly find and gather data about the forty-one degree-granting institutions and could even organize it into information if willing to invest the time and cognitive effort. By completing these two stages thoroughly and then creating knowledge by wrapping that information in context, the *DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision* has provided a nudge—all while preserving freedom of choice—towards a wise decision.

The result of this redesigned choice architecture will be that students can more effectively navigate the West Virginia college search and application process and end up in colleges best suited to their needs. This reduced complexity opens the door for more students to make the transition from high school to college (the current college-going rate in Gilmer County where data for this project was collected is 53%)(West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission 2014), which could provide long-ranging socio-economic impacts to the state through a better-educated workforce and a reduction in the percentage of residents living below the poverty level due to increased educational attainment.

Extensions of this research into other areas of teenage life could include providing nudges to teens in less systematic decisions they face such as nudging young drivers to form safe habits, encouraging the recognition and pursuit of healthy relationships, or inspiring impressionable young adults to avoid drugs or alcohol. These decisions have much less natural structure built around them and less defined and finite choice possibilities like the timelines and options associated with selecting and applying to a college. Creating better choice architecture in all areas of the lives of teens could have equally positive social and economic affects for West Virginia. ♦

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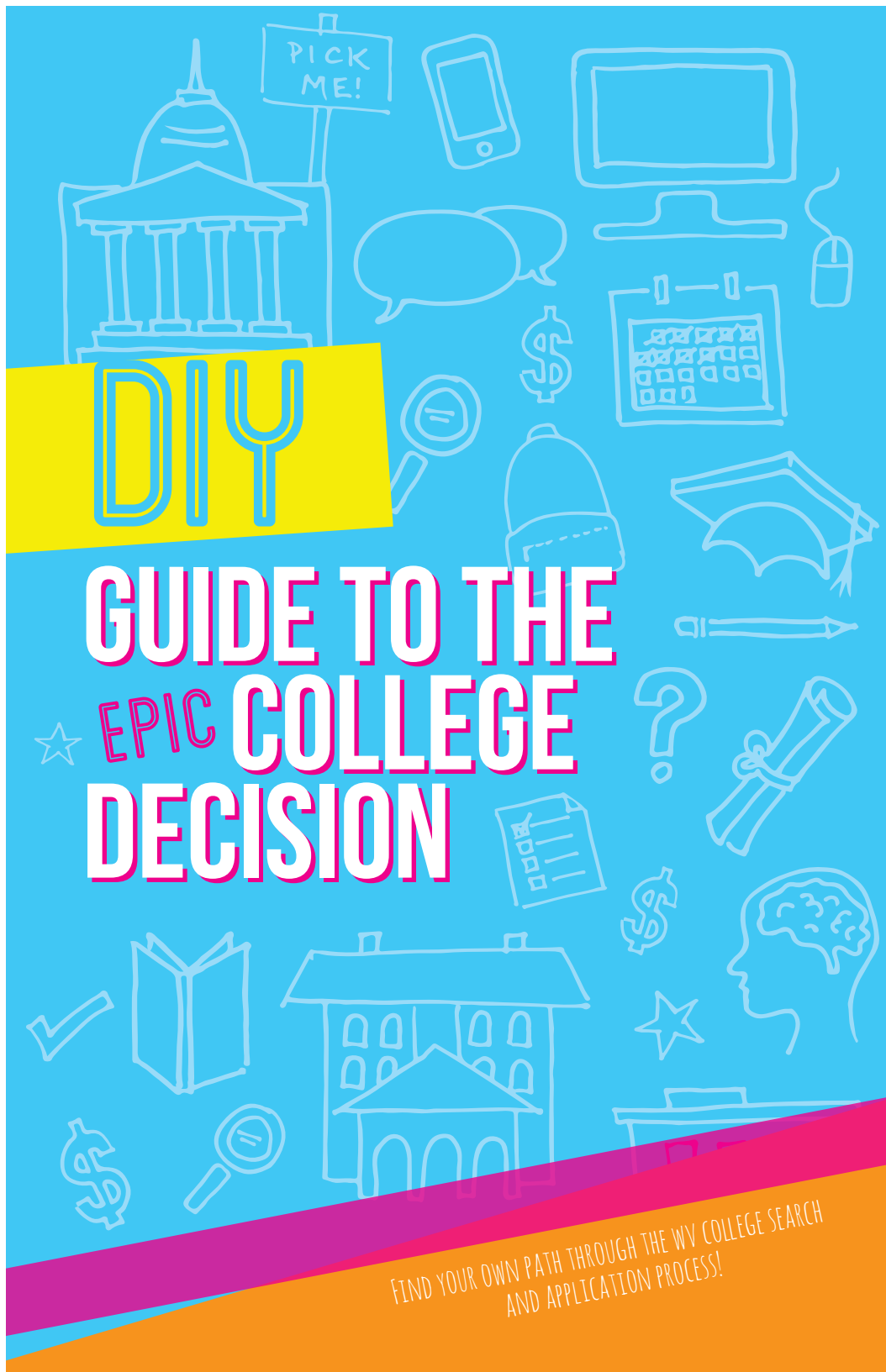
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APPENDIX A



DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Booklet cover

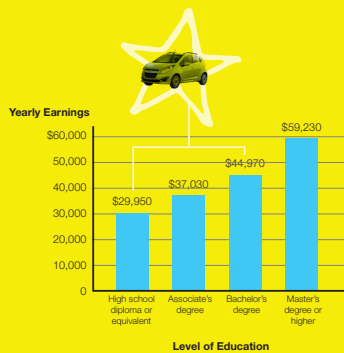


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TO COLLEGE, OR NOT TO COLLEGE, THAT IS THE QUESTION — (THAT ACTUALLY SEEMS LIKE TWO QUESTIONS....)

2011 AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS
OF WORKERS AGES 25-34



Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics
Car Image Source: www.chevy.com

As you begin to countdown the days until high school graduation, you've probably already thought about what you'll do after that diploma is handed down, the valedictorian gives a speech about holding on to the memories of Mr. Smith's chemistry class experiment-gone-bad, and your parents breath an audible sigh of relief that you *really* did make it. One of those post-graduation options of course, is college!

Congratulations... if you're holding this guide, then you are already taking steps to explore what West Virginia colleges have to offer. (Did you know you can study to develop video games?!) Not only is college a great adventure, but college graduates have a headstart towards prosperity. On average, workers with a Bachelor degree earn \$15,000 more per year than those with only a high school diploma. That's enough to buy a brand-new, totally sweet Chevy Spark!

DON'T FEEL LIKE RESEARCHING 41 DIFFERENT COLLEGES? (WHO HAS TIME FOR THAT??)



Yes, West Virginia is home to forty-one colleges that award Associate and Bachelor degrees! That's great because it means YOU have a lot of options, but not-so-great because it means you have lots of homework to find the *best* option.

Making the transition from high school to college can be confusing—there are new terms to become familiar with, a to-do list that lasts through most of your junior and senior years of high school, and choice after choice that can only be made by **you**.

Maybe you receive mail, you see and hear commercials, and you visit websites to find a college that will fit. But with such variety, it can be nearly impossible to compare those options on a level playing field! That's where this guide comes in to save the day. Not only are we going to walk you through the basics of how to get to college, but we're also going to provide some super-handly tools that will help filter through those forty-one options to find the two or three that you're most excited about.

Let's dive in!

FIRST THINGS FIRST: KNOW THE LINGO

Before you jump into the important things like which school has the best food*, it's helpful to have a clear understanding of a few important terms that you'll be seeing again and again.



*Sorry, not covered in this guide. :(

ASSOCIATE DEGREE

typically completed in 2 years, or 60 **credit hours** / requires taking basic courses like English and math along with courses specific to your **program of study** / can be converted into credit towards a **Bachelor degree** when transferring to a **four-year school** / comes in varieties like A.A., A.S., and A.A.S

BACCALAUREATE (BACHELOR) DEGREE

typically completed in 4 years, or 120 **credit hours** / along with basic courses like English and math you must complete several credit hours (ranging from 40-72) related to your **program of study** and several hours of **electives** / also referred to as an **undergraduate** degree / comes in varieties like B.A., B.S., B.F.A., and others

PUBLIC SCHOOL

some of the school's financial support comes from the state government / each state has at least one public university / typically charge out-of-state students higher **tuition** and fees

PRIVATE SCHOOL

the school's financial support comes mainly from student **tuition**, private donations, and the support of non-government organizations (often religious) / typically charge much higher tuition than **public schools** but can also provide significant **financial aid** to students who qualify

TWO-YEAR SCHOOL

schools that only award certificates and **Associate degrees** / seek to prepare students for a particular occupation or to transfer to a **four-year school** / also referred to as junior college or community and technical school

FOUR-YEAR SCHOOL (LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY)

schools that offer at least a **Baccalaureate** degree in a wide variety of programs / universities award baccalaureate, graduate (Master, Ph.D.), and professional degrees (M.D., J.D., etc)

FOR-PROFIT SCHOOL

school that is in business to make money for its shareholders or owners / typically offer fewer student services and activities than non-profit schools / non-profit institutions in contrast, do not have owners, but are guided by a Board of Governors who have diverse areas of expertise and are from the community / graduation rates at for-profit schools tend to be lower than those at non-profit institutions

<p>ENROLLMENT</p>	<p>process of choosing courses for the upcoming semester and then paying fees for the courses / also refers to the total number of students who are currently taking courses at that institution</p>	<p>TUITION</p>	<p>amount charged for each credit hour or course taken and only covers the fee for taking the class itself, does not cover the fees for room and board, books, technology fees or other charges / typically lower for residents of the state (in-state)</p>	<p>ROOM & BOARD</p>	<p>amount charged to live in a dorm or apartment provided by the institution and to cover meals in the school's cafeterias or eateries / most schools provide a variety of options to choose from</p>	<p>FAFSA</p>	<p>Free Application for Federal Student Aid is a standard application that students must complete if they wish to receive loans, grants, or work-study funds from the state or federal government / most scholarships also require a student to have completed the FAFSA in order to be considered / must be completed each year of schooling</p>	<p>FINANCIAL AID</p>	<p>broad term used to describe all of the scholarships, loans, grants, and work-study funds that a student receives in order to help pay for college / can only be awarded to students who complete the FAFSA and will vary depending on many factors, including financial need, academic performance, student classification, and available funds</p>	<p>ROLLING ADMISSION</p>	<p>policy that gives students a very long window of time to apply and be accepted to a school / applicants are notified of acceptance or rejection within a few weeks of applying, regardless of when they apply / applying early to a school with rolling admission can sometimes improve chances of receiving a scholarship, allow for first choice in housing options, and reduce stress associated with deadlines</p>	<p>MAJOR/ PROGRAM OF STUDY</p>	<p>chosen field of study that requires a student to successfully complete a specific number of credit hours within that field / often differs from the actual degree awarded (i.e. a student chooses to major in graphic design, but the degree awarded for that program may be called Bachelor of Fine Arts)</p>	<p>MINOR</p>	<p>a secondary field of study that requires a student to successfully complete a specific number of credit hours within that field, but on a lesser scale than those required for a major</p>	<p>ADMISSIONS COUNSELOR</p>	<p>school official who assists incoming students with the application process by providing the most up-to-date information about the school's offerings, outlining requirements and coaching students through the choices they must make in association with that particular school</p>	<p>UNDERGRADUATE</p>	<p>student pursuing a two- or four-year degree</p>	<p>CREDIT HOURS</p>	<p>the way courses are measured in higher education / one credit hour typically means one hour per week spent in the classroom although this can vary for lab, studio, or PE classes / most courses range from 1-6 credit hours</p>	<p>ELECTIVES</p>	<p>courses a student may take outside the requirements for their degree program in order to broaden their education / most schools require students to choose electives from certain groupings like arts, sciences, or humanities</p>	<p>COMMUTE ONLY</p>	<p>school that offers no dorms or housing options</p>
<p>OKAY, LET'S MOVE ON!</p>																									

COLLEGE PREP JUNIOR TIMELINE

If you think planning all the details for a perfect prom night next spring is stressful, just wait until you start trying to coordinate the next two years of college preparation! Fortunately, you've got this guide and we're giving you a sneak peak of what needs to happen between now and your first college class.



AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY
Focus on making great grades!	Get involved: join clubs, volunteer.	Take PSAT	Write down what you want in a college.	Create a list of 6-10 schools of interest.	Meet with guidance counselor. Review class plan for senior year.	Take ACT	Research scholarships for next year	Take ACT	Take SAT	Take ACT	Draft application essays and scholarship essays. Compile junior portfolio or resume.
	Request materials from schools you're interested in.					Develop a summer plan. How will you build your resume?		Campus visits		Take SAT	
	Attend college fairs							Attend college fairs			

Testing, 1, 2...testing.

If you're hoping to go to college, standardized tests like the ACT and SAT are a must. It's common to take each test more than once, so work the nerves out and try it your junior year to allow time for improvements when senior year rolls around.

ACT

7 locations in WV
Sept, Oct, Dec, Feb, Apr, June
actstudent.org/regist/centers



SAT

14 locations in WV
Mar, May, June
sat.collegeboard.org/register

COLLEGE PREP SENIOR TIMELINE

While your junior year involved lots of research and self-discovery, senior year is all about making things happen! It's time to narrow down that list of favorite schools and start lots and lots of paperwork.



AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY
<p>Have a sitdown conversation with your parents about your wishes and goals.</p> <p>Still not sure about a major? Try taking a career interest assessment.</p>	Take ACT	Take ACT	Submit applications			2/1 School scholarship application deadlines.	Send transcripts, deposits, and necessary forms.			Graduate!	
	Many schools begin processing applications!	Narrow your list to 2-4 colleges that you will apply to.	Submit scholarship applications				Take SAT	4/15 Higher Education Grant deadline.	Attend orientation, gather supplies, and contact your roommate.		6/30 Final FAFSA deadline to receive federal aid.
		Campus visits	Attend financial aid events			3/1 WV Promise Scholarship deadline!	Watch the mail for important award letters.	5/1 Cutoff to decide which school is the winner!			
	Prepare resume and portfolio		Take ACT	1/1 FAFSA is available.				Final deadline for most scholarships.	Notify schools you do not plan to attend.		
	Ask teachers, coaches, and mentors for letters of recommendation.			Meet with guidance counselor to ensure transcripts, test scores, and necessary forms are sent to appropriate schools.							
			WV Promise Scholarship application available.							GRADUATION!	
			Many schools start awarding scholarships.								

DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Booklet spread design.

COLLEGE PREP RESOURCES



Are you ready to become BFFs with Google? Research for your junior English paper will be good practice for the work you'll need to do in preparing for college. But you don't have to start with a blank search bar! Here are some helpful places to begin your research into scholarships, financial aid, test preparation, career options and more.

Some sites will ask you to create an account and profile so that you can be matched to suitable options and so that you can save information (like bigfuture.collegeboard.org). Other sites will ask you to create an account and pay for their services. Before taking this step, remember that there are literally millions of websites out there that offer planning resources for free. It's also important to be on the lookout for scams!**

Last but not least, keep in mind that statistics from comparison sites can only tell you so much about a school. Use them to create a list, and then GO VISIT (!) those schools in person to see what they're really like.

**Fastweb.com and schoolsoup.com offer databases of scholarships and contests, but are also littered with scams and contests that are too good to be true. Be careful!

WEST VIRGINIA RESOURCES

cfww.com

Find basic info about all WV schools, financial aid planning resources, WV scholarships and grants, blogs written by college students, and basic overviews of a variety of majors and career options. **Hint:** This is where you'll go for information and the application for the WV Promise Scholarship, the Higher Education Grant, and other state-sponsored scholarships.

wvde.state.wvu.us/counselors/students/scholarships.html

A list of regional, state, and national scholarships, loans and contests.

tgkvf.org

Over 90 private scholarships and loans just for WV residents.

molohanfoundation.org

Scholarships, loans, and internship opportunities for WV residents.

NATIONAL RESOURCES

actstudent.org

Test preparation tools, financial aid explanations and links, questions to ask during a campus visit and much more.

nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator

Search and compare WV schools by statistics like graduation rate, costs, athletics, campus security, etc.

colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges

Each year, *U.S. News & World Report* publishes rankings for more than 1,800 schools in the U.S. In addition to rankings, they provide numerous articles and tools to help students find the school that best fits their needs.

collegeresults.org

Create a customized, side-by-side comparison of schools to get many types of data, including stats about acceptance rates and average test scores, race and ethnicity make-up, and even which athletic conference a school participates in.

FREE APP

evernote.com

Keep your research and to-do list in order with this free app. Save web pages, document your thoughts in video notes, and organize scans or images that are important. **BONUS:** Once you actually get to college, you'll be an expert Evernote user and can be the most organized freshman on campus!

LET'S MEET THE CONTESTANTS!



✓ WORLD-RENOWNED FACULTY!



✓ AWESOME SPORTS TEAMS!



✓ 100+ CLUBS & ORGANIZATIONS!



✓ SCHOLARSHIP OFFER!

Just like a great reality show, the college search involves dozens of wildly different contestants—each of them throwing themselves at you in an effort to walk away with the big prize: your enrollment! You may seek advice from friends and family only to get a different answer from each one of them.

That's why it is important for you to decide what you want out of your college experience! Then begin whittling down the list of potential schools based on whether they can deliver that experience at a cost you can manage, and in a location that you like. The rest of this guide and the decision-making tools in the other pocket of this folder will help you evaluate each school—on a level playing field—to find the one where you can live happily ever after.

(AT LEAST FOR THE NEXT 2-4 YEARS.)

AT-A-GLANCE TWO-YEAR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Associate Degree
B Bachelor Degree
\$ < \$6,000
\$\$ \$6,001 - \$12,000
\$\$\$ \$12,001 - \$26,000
• < 2,000 students
•• 2,001 - 10,000 students
••• 10,001+ students

SCHOOL	CITY	WEBSITE	DEGREES OFFERED	TUITION COST	STUDENTS ENROLLED	ADMISSIONS PHONE #	ADMISSIONS EMAIL	MAJORS WEBPAGE
Blue Ridge CTC	Martinsburg	blueridgectc.edu	A	\$	••	304-260-4380 ext.2000	admissions@blueridgectc.edu	blueridgectc.edu/eam-a-degree/associates-degree-programs
Bridgemont CTC	Montgomery	bridgemont.edu	A	\$	•	304-734-6600	admissions@bridgemont.edu	bridgemont.edu/index.php/degree-programs
Eastern CTC	Moorefield	easternwv.edu	A	\$	•	877-982-2322	askeast@eastern.wvnet.edu	easternwv.edu/Academics
Kanawha Valley CTC	South Charleston	kvctc.edu	A	\$	•	304-205-6700	admissions@kvctc.edu	kvctc.edu/associate-degrees
Mountwest CTC	Huntington	mctc.edu	A	\$	••	304-710-3060	admissions@mctc.edu	mctc.edu/academics/our-programs
New River CTC	Beckley	newriver.edu	A	\$	••	866-349-3739	admissions@newriver.edu	newriver.edu/quicklinks/degree-programs
Pierpont CTC	Fairmont	pierpont.edu	A	\$	••	855-297-0999	admit@pierpont.edu	pierpont.edu/academics/undergrad_pgm_listing.asp
Southern West Virginia CTC	Mount Gay	southernwv.edu	A	\$	••	304-896-7348		southernwv.edu/programs
West Virginia Northern CTC	Wheeling	wncc.edu	A	\$	••	304-214-8925	admissions@mail.wncc.edu	wncc.edu/programs-of-study



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AT-A-GLANCE TWO-YEAR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

A Associate Degree
B Bachelor Degree
\$ < \$6,000
\$\$ \$6,001 - \$12,000
\$\$\$ \$12,001 - \$26,000
• < 2,000 students
•• 2,001 - 10,000 students
••• 10,001+ students

SCHOOL	CITY	WEBSITE	DEGREES OFFERED	TUITION COST	STUDENTS ENROLLED	ADMISSIONS PHONE #	ADMISSIONS EMAIL	MAJORS WEBPAGE
Huntington Junior College *	Huntington	huntingtonjuniorcollege.edu	A	\$\$	•	800-344-4522	admissions@huntingtonjuniorcollege.edu	huntingtonjuniorcollege.edu/academics/degree.html
ITT Technical Institute - Huntington *	Huntington	itt-tech.edu	A	\$\$\$	•	800-224-4695		programinfo.itt-tech.edu
Mountain State College *	Parkersburg	msc.edu	A	\$\$	•	800-841-0201	admin@msc.edu	msc.edu/programs_of_study.htm
Valley College - Beckley *	Beckley	valley.edu	A	\$\$\$	•	304-252-9547		valley.edu/programs
Valley College - Martinsburg *	Martinsburg	valley.edu	A	\$\$	•	304-263-0979		valley.edu/programs
West Virginia Business College *	Wheeling	wvbc.edu	A	\$\$	•	304-232-0361	bwoodland@wvbc.edu	wvbc.edu/prospective-students/specialized-associate-degrees
West Virginia Junior College - Bridgeport *	Bridgeport	wvjc.edu	A	\$\$	•	800-470-JOBS	admissions@wvjcinfo.net	wvjc.edu/bridgeport-programs
West Virginia Junior College - Charleston *	Charleston	wvjc.edu	A	\$\$	•	800-924-5208	admissions@wvjc.edu	wvjc.edu/charleston-programs
West Virginia Junior College - Morgantown *	Morgantown	wvjc.edu	A	\$\$\$	•	304-296-8282	morgantownadmissions@wvjc.edu	wvjc.edu/morgantown-programs

* for-profit school



AT-A-GLANCE FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- A** Associate Degree
- B** Bachelor Degree
- \$** < \$6,000
- \$\$** \$6,001 - \$12,000
- \$\$\$** \$12,001 - \$26,000
- < 2,000 students
- 2,001 - 10,000 students
- 10,001+ students

SCHOOL	CITY	WEBSITE	DEGREES OFFERED	TUITION COST	STUDENTS ENROLLED	ADMISSIONS PHONE #	ADMISSIONS EMAIL	MAJORS WEBPAGE
Bluefield State College	Bluefield	bluefieldstate.edu	A B	\$	•	800-344-8892	bscadmit@bluefieldstate.edu	bluefieldstate.edu/academics/majors-minors
Concord University	Athens	concord.edu	A B	\$	••	888-384-5249	admissions@concord.edu	catalog.concord.edu
Fairmont State University	Fairmont	fairmontstate.edu	A B	\$	••	800-641-5678	admit@FairmontState.edu	fairmontstate.edu/academics/undergrad_pgm_listing.asp
Glenville State College	Glenville	glenville.edu	A B	\$	•	800-924-2010	admissions@glenville.edu	glenville.edu/academics/degrees.php
Marshall University	Huntington	marshall.edu	A B	\$	•••	800-642-3499	admissions@marshall.edu	marshall.edu/landing/academics/degrees.html
Potomac State College of WVU	Keyser	potomacstatecollege.edu	A B	\$	•	800-262-7332	Go2PSC@mail.wvu.edu	potomacstatecollege.edu/academics/majors
Shepherd University	Shepherdstown	shepherd.edu	B	\$	••	800-344-5231	admissions@shepherd.edu	shepherd.edu/admissions/majors.html
West Liberty University	West Liberty	westliberty.edu	A B	\$	••	304-336-8076	admissions@westliberty.edu	westliberty.edu/academics/programs-of-study
West Virginia State University	Institute	wvstateu.edu	B	\$	••	304-204-4345	admissions@wvstateu.edu	wvstateu.edu/wvsu-catalog/undergraduate-degrees.aspx
West Virginia University	Morgantown	wvu.edu	B	\$\$	•••	304-293-2121	wvuadmissions@mail.wvu.edu	majors.wvu.edu
WVU Institute of Technology	Montgomery	wvutech.edu	B	\$	•	888-554-8324	tech-admissions@mail.wvu.edu	academics.wvutech.edu
WVU Parkersburg	Parkersburg	wvup.edu	A B	\$	••	800-WVA-WVUP	wvupinfo@mail.wvu.edu	wvup.edu/academics/programs-of-study



DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Booklet spread design.

AT-A-GLANCE FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

A Associate Degree
B Bachelor Degree
\$ < \$6,000
\$\$ \$6,001 - \$12,000
\$\$\$ \$12,001 - \$26,000
• < 2,000 students
•• 2,001 - 10,000 students
••• 10,001+ students

SCHOOL	CITY	WEBSITE	DEGREES OFFERED	TUITION COST	STUDENTS ENROLLED	ADMISSIONS PHONE #	ADMISSIONS EMAIL	MAJORS WEBPAGE
Alderson Broaddus University (American Baptist)	Philippi	ab.edu	A B	\$\$\$	•	800-263-1549	admissions@ab.edu	ab.edu/academics/degrees-majors
American Public University Systems *	Charles Town	apus.edu	A B	\$\$	•••	877-777-9081	info@apus.edu	apu.apus.edu/academic/programs
Appalachian Bible College (Baptist)	Mount Hope	abc.edu	A B	\$\$\$	•	800-678-9ABC	admissions@abc.edu	abc.edu/academics
Bethany College (Christian Church)	Bethany	bethanywv.edu	B	\$\$\$	•	800-922-7611	enrollment@bethanywv.edu	bethanywv.edu/academics/degrees-and-majors
Davis & Elkins College (Presbyterian Church)	Elkins	dewv.edu	A B	\$\$\$	•	800-624-3157		dewv.edu/academics/academic-programs
Ohio Valley University (Church of Christ)	Vienna	ovu.edu	A B	\$\$\$	•	877-446-8668	admissions@ovu.edu	ovu.edu/site.cfm/CollegesSchoolsPrograms.cfm
Salem International University *	Salem	salemu.edu	A B	\$\$\$	•	800-283-4562		salemu.edu/programs/bachelor-degrees
Strayer University - WV *	Scott Depot	strayer.edu/west-virginia	A B	\$\$\$	•	304-760-1700	teaysvalley@strayer.edu	strayer.edu/academic-program-finder
University of Charleston	Charleston	ucwv.edu	A B	\$\$\$	•	800-995-4682	admissions@ucwv.edu	ucwv.edu/majors
West Virginia Wesleyan College (United Methodist)	Buckhannon	wwwc.edu	B	\$\$\$	•	800-722-9933	admission@wwwc.edu	wwwc.edu/academics/majors.php
Wheeling Jesuit University (Roman Catholic)	Wheeling	wju.edu	B	\$\$\$	•	800-624-6992	admiss@wju.edu	wju.edu/academics

* for-profit school



DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Booklet spread design.

EENIE MEENIE...

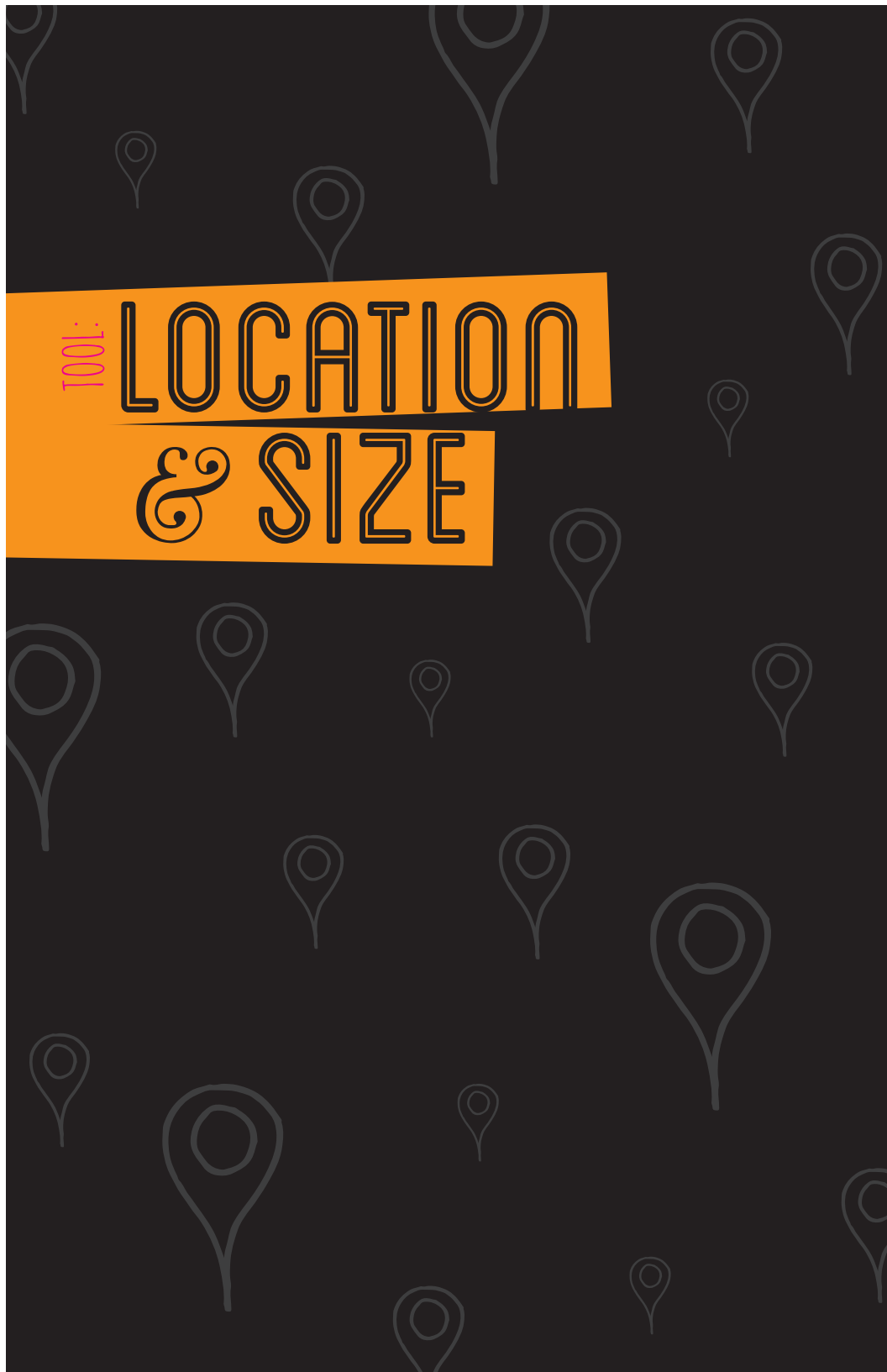
Now that we've covered the basics, it's time to take a more in-depth look at the selection of West Virginia colleges and what each has to offer. Choosing a school shouldn't be a game of eenie, meenie, minie, moe! The cards in the right pocket of this folder are tools that can help narrow forty-one schools down to five or six that best fit your own personal criteria.

We've done the legwork to round up information about:

- ✓ **LOCATION & SIZE**
- ✓ **COST**
- ✓ **TYPES OF DEGREES OFFERED**
- ✓ **MAJORS**

Use the tools in the order that's most interesting to you and use the provided area on the back of each tool to write your list of "maybes." Once you've narrowed the field, start visiting your favorite schools in person!

Data for this project was gathered from the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and from the school's individual websites.

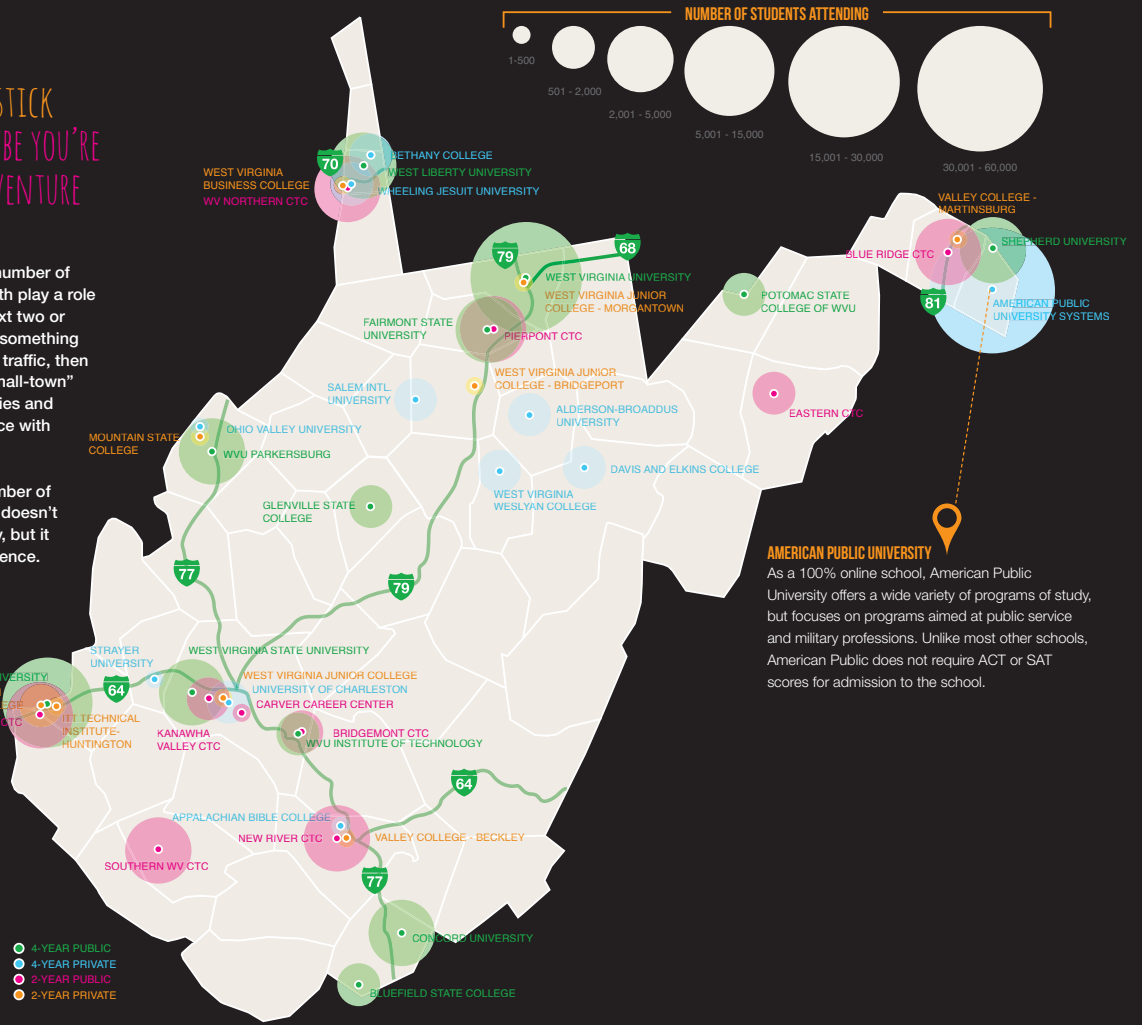


DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Location & Size.
5.5" x 8.5" folded card, front cover

MAYBE YOU WANT TO STICK CLOSE TO HOME... MAYBE YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN ADVENTURE IN A NEW PLACE!

Location of a school and the number of students who attend it can both play a role in how much you enjoy the next two or four years. We're all for trying something new, but if you hate cities and traffic, then you may want to choose a "small-town" college. If you thrive on activities and hitting the town, choose a place with lots of options.

Just keep in mind that the number of students who attend a school doesn't necessarily indicate it's quality, but it may impact your social experience.



AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY
As a 100% online school, American Public University offers a wide variety of programs of study, but focuses on programs aimed at public service and military professions. Unlike most other schools, American Public does not require ACT or SAT scores for admission to the school.

DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Location & Size. 5.5" x 8.5" folded card, inside spread

MYTH ALERT!

Attending a big school does not necessarily mean that you'll get less personal attention or be in mega classes. Most schools average 1 faculty member for every 14-20 students. At whichever school you choose to attend, you'll be assigned an advisor who can help you schedule classes and even find resources like tutoring. It's up to YOU to take advantage of their help though!

SCHOOLS I MIIIIIGHT BE INTERESTED IN: (BASED ON SIZE/LOCATION)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Location & Size. 5.5" x 8.5" folded card, back cover



DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Cost.
5.5" x 8.5" folded card, front cover

MONEY'S NOT EVERYTHING, BUT WE'D BE LYING IF WE SAID IT WASN'T IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT WHEN MAKING YOUR LIST.

As you can see in the graph, costs vary greatly depending on which "type" of school you want to attend (2-year public, 4-year public, 2-year private, 4-year private). Before deciding for or against a school just because of its cost, think carefully about what you want to get out of your college experience. Want to go to sporting events and be involved in lots of organizations? Then the least expensive 2-year school may not be the best fit!

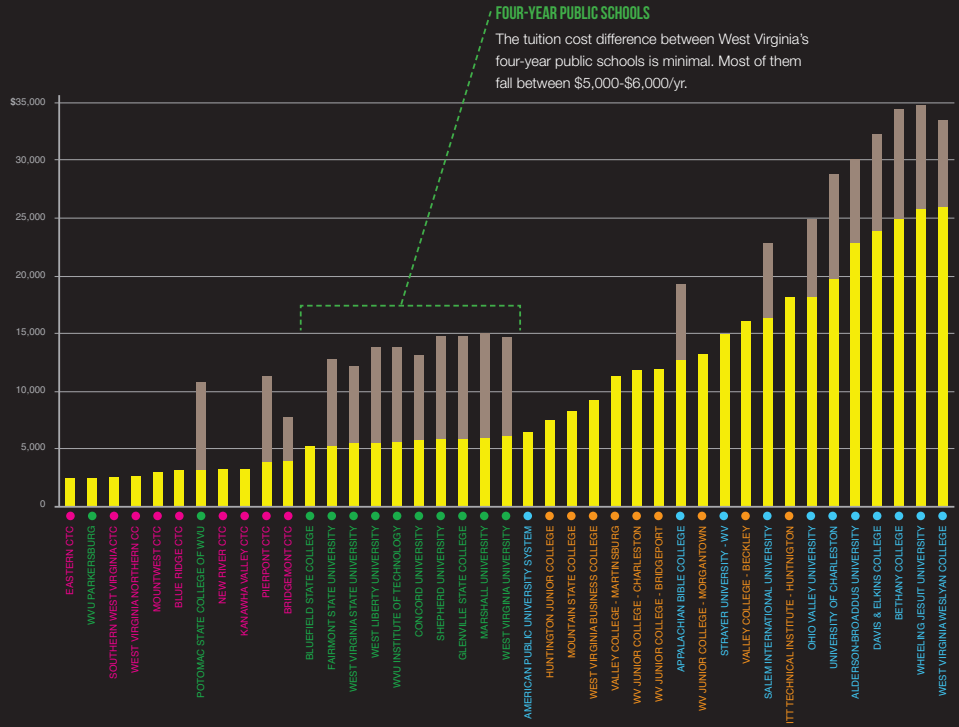
TUITION & FEES (one full school year or 24 credit hours)
ROOM & BOARD (one full school year, on campus)

Keep in mind that you'll need to pay tuition for each year that you attend school. The prices to the right may not appear to be that different, but when you multiply that yearly tuition by two or by four, there can be drastic differences in the total cost of earning a degree!

2 Years' Tuition:
 Eastern Community & Technical College vs. ITT Technical Institute



4 Years' Tuition:
 Potomac State College of WVU vs. West Virginia Wesleyan College



4-YEAR PUBLIC
 4-YEAR PRIVATE
 2-YEAR PUBLIC
 2-YEAR PRIVATE

DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Cost. 5.5" x 8.5" folded card, inside spread

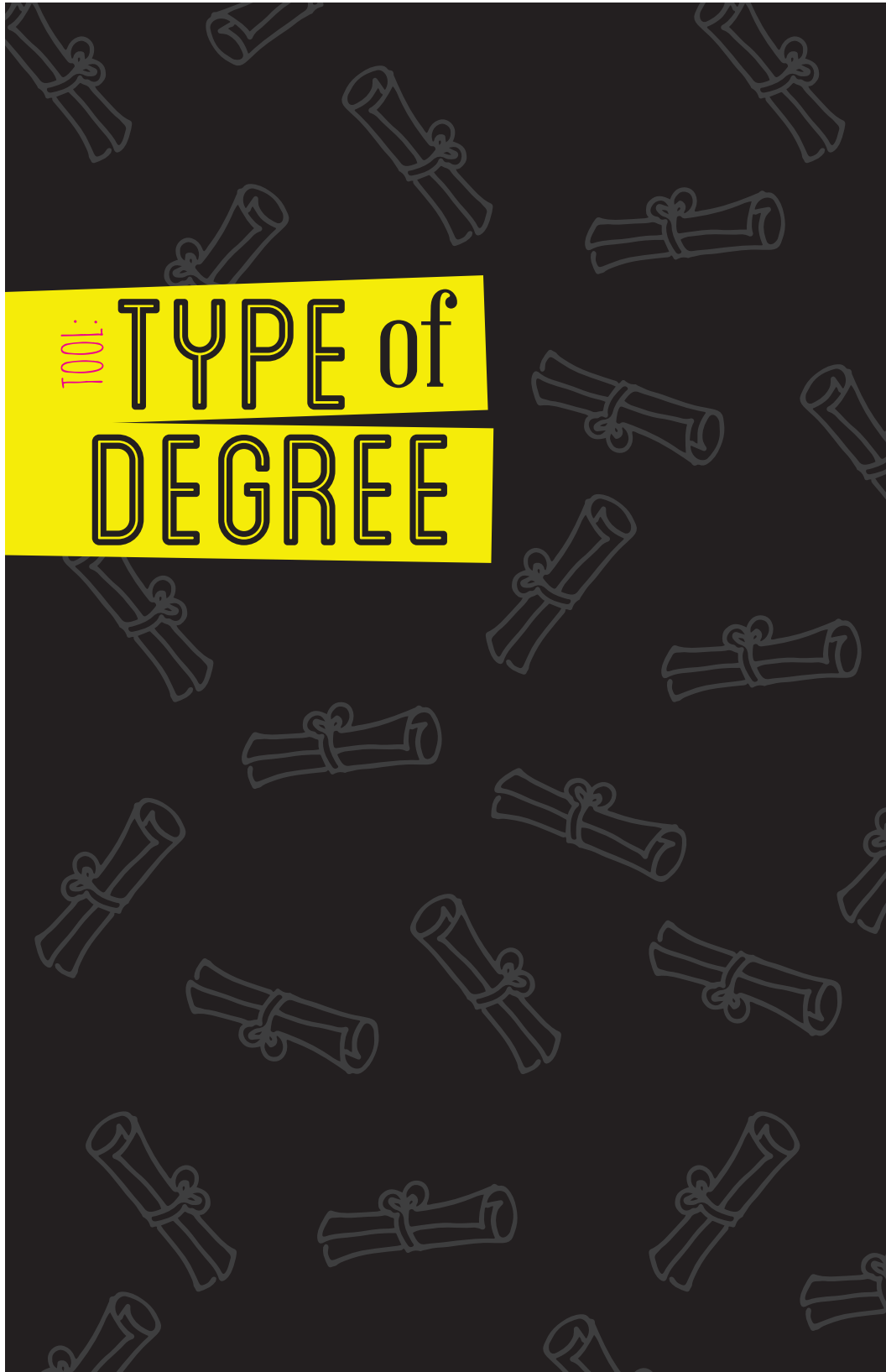
MYTH ALERT!

Pursuing a four year liberal arts degree does not mean that you'll waste time and money taking a bunch of "general" classes. Likewise, going to school for a two year technical degree does not mean that you'll only learn how to do one thing. Liberal arts schools and universities tend to have more organizations and activities that allow students to have a broad range of experiences, while elective courses provide opportunities for students to find a unique niche in their chosen field. Technical schools often have strong ties to industry and emerging tech fields, leading to good job placement opportunities for graduates. Whichever degree you choose, it's up to YOU to seek out experiences that increase your employability.

SCHOOLS I MIIIIIGHT BE INTERESTED IN: (BASED ON COST)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

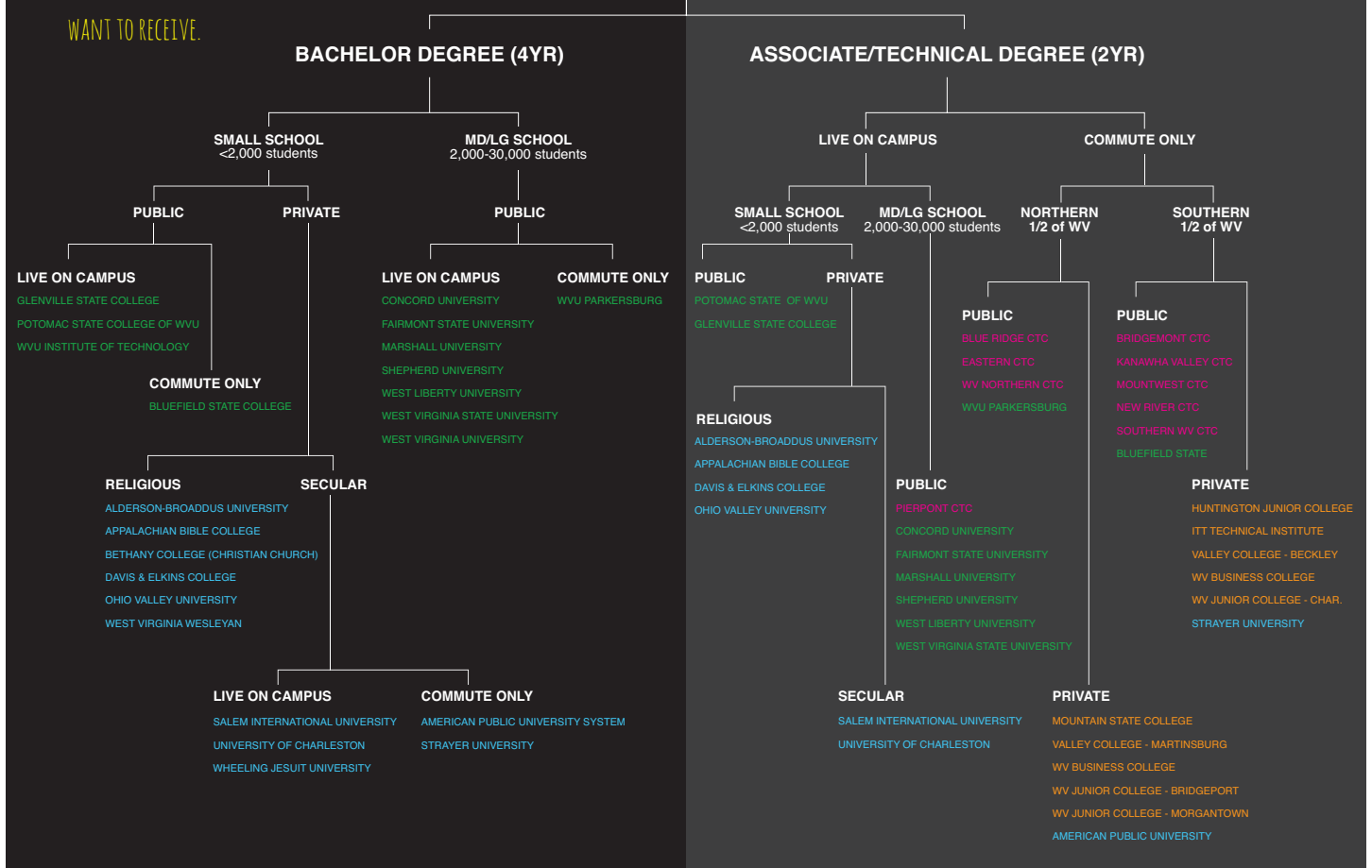
DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Cost. 5.5" x 8.5" folded card, back cover



DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Type of Degree.
5.5" x 8.5" folded card, front cover

WANT A QUICK WAY TO FILTER DOWN TO A HANDFUL OF SCHOOLS? USE THIS FLOW CHART TO FIND OPTIONS BASED ON THE DEGREE YOU WANT TO RECEIVE.

I WANT TO EARN A(N):



DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Type of Degree. 5.5" x 8.5" folded card, inside spread

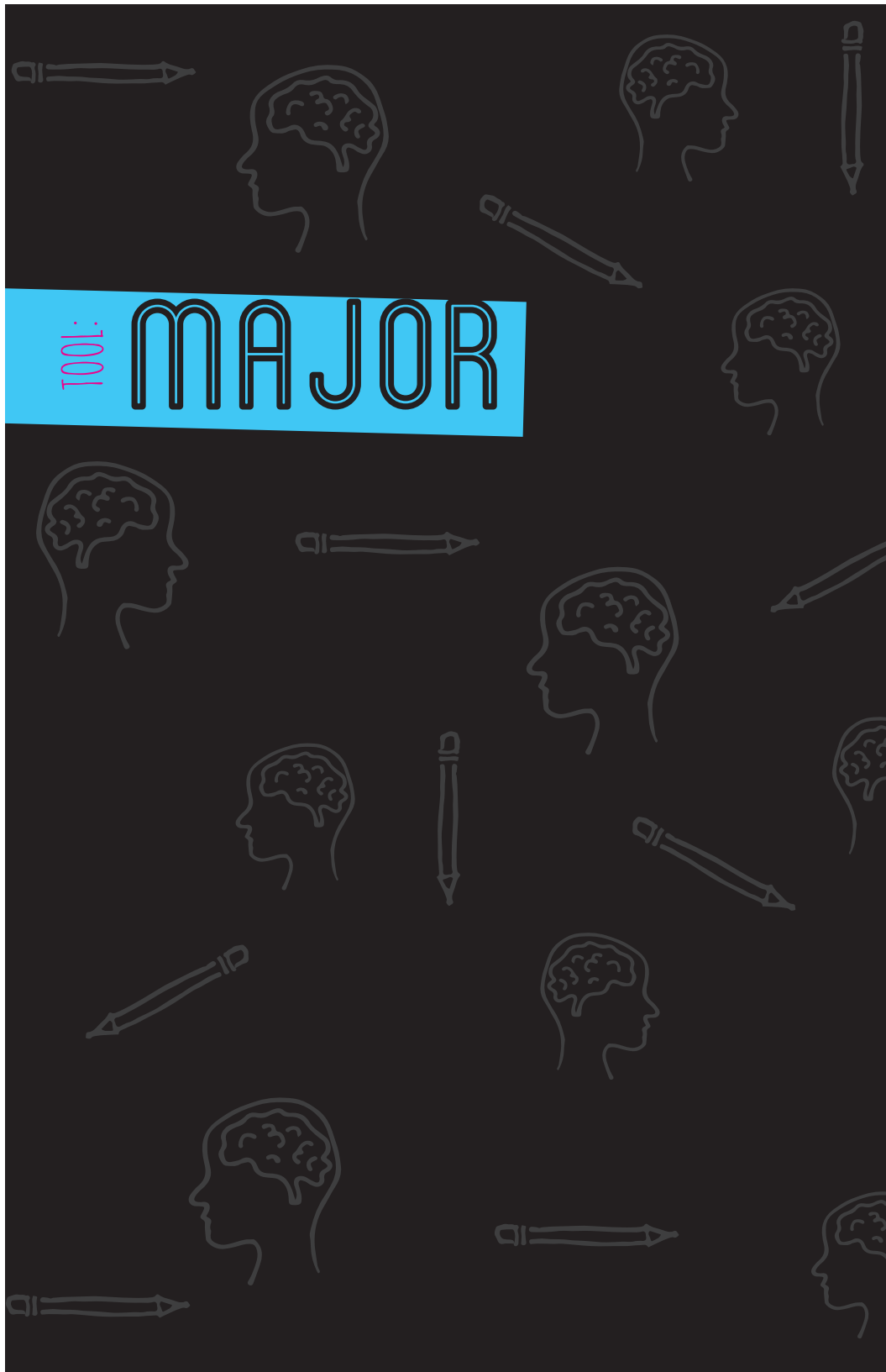
MYTH ALERT!

You don't need to be rich to attend a private school. Although they typically have higher tuition rates, they also offer financial aid and scholarships that can help offset the price tag. Don't mark a school off your list yet just because of cost. Instead, contact an admissions counselor at that school to ask what you can do to maximize your chance of earning a good financial aid package.

SCHOOLS I MIIIIIGHT BE INTERESTED IN: (BASED ON DEGREE)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Type of Degree. 5.5" x 8.5" folded card, back cover



DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Major.
5.5" x 8.5" folded card, front cover

MANY STUDENTS WORK IN REVERSE WHEN TRYING TO CHOOSE A COLLEGE.

They 1) decide what career they want, 2) find degrees that lead to that career, and then 3) find schools with that major. According to the Bureau of Labor, these professions are among some of the fastest-growing for 2020, so we did the research to find out which WV schools can hook you up!

HOT JOBS of the FUTURE

OTHER GROWING PROFESSIONS

- Data Scientist
- Occupational Therapist
- Financial Advisor/Financial Analyst
- Physician Assistant
- Network Systems Analyst
- Civil Engineer
- Dental Hygienist
- Medical Scientist
- Home Health Aide
- Environmental Engineer

WANT THIS CAREER?

ACCOUNTANT

"Accountants are coming into great demand as businesses submit to greater oversight after the subprime mortgage meltdown. They're particularly needed in government, where they'll be the people who devise new regulations."
Forbes

VETERINARIAN

"Pet owners are increasingly seeking nontraditional services, such as preventative dental care. Advances in the field are also allowing veterinarians to offer procedures common for humans, including hip replacement, blood transfusions, and cancer treatment, creating a need for more professionals."
www.boston.com

COMPUTER SOFTWARE/ SYSTEMS SOFTWARE ENGINEER

"Software developers are the creative minds behind computer programs. Some develop the applications that allow people to do specific tasks on a computer or other device. Others develop the underlying systems that run the devices or control networks."
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

BIOMEDICAL ENGINEER

"In the coming decade, engineering is expected to offer the fastest-growing area: biomedical engineering. Jobs in this field, which centers on developing and testing health-care innovations such as artificial organs or imaging systems, are expected to grow by 72%."
The Wall Street Journal

ATHLETIC TRAINER/ PHYSICAL THERAPIST

"The aging baby-boomer population will require increased physical care. At the same time, growth in competitive sports and fitness is creating demand for those trained in repairing participants."
New York Daily News

TRY THIS MAJOR

Accounting

Vet schools do not require any certain major for admission, but a science-related major is good preparation for the rigors of veterinary coursework. Consider: **Biology, Chemistry, Animal Science, Biochemistry,** or a designated **Pre-Veterinary** program

Software Engineering, Computer Science, or Computer Information Systems

Biomedical Engineering
Alternatively, students may choose to pursue a graduate program in Biomedical Engineering by preparing with an undergraduate degree in **Engineering, Physics, Chemistry, or Biology.**

Athletic Training
Physical Therapy is a graduate-level program, but students can prepare by choosing undergraduate majors in **Biology, Chemistry,** a designated **Pre-Physical Therapy** program or other health or science degree.

CONSIDER THIS SCHOOL

- BLUE RIDGE CTC
- BRIDGEMONT CTC
- EASTERN CTC
- KANAWHA VALLEY CTC
- MOUNTWEST CTC
- NEW RIVER CTC
- PIERPONT CTC
- SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA CTC
- WEST VIRGINIA NORTHERN CC
- HUNTINGTON JUNIOR COLLEGE
- MOUNTAIN STATE COLLEGE
- VALLEY COLLEGE - BECKLEY
- VALLEY COLLEGE - MARTINSBURG
- WEST VIRGINIA BUSINESS COLLEGE
- WV JUNIOR COLLEGE - CHARLESTON
- WV JUNIOR COLLEGE - BRIDGEPORT
- WV JUNIOR COLLEGE - MORGANTOWN

- BLUEFIELD STATE COLLEGE
- CONCORD UNIVERSITY
- FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY
- GLENVILLE STATE COLLEGE
- MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
- POTOMAC STATE COLLEGE OF WVU
- SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY
- WEST LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
- WEST VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY
- WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
- WVU INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
- WVU PARKERSBURG
- ALDERSON-BROADHURST UNIVERSITY
- AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
- APPALACHIAN BIBLE COLLEGE
- BETHANY COLLEGE
- DAVIS & ELKINS COLLEGE
- OHIO VALLEY UNIVERSITY
- SALEM INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
- STRAYER UNIVERSITY - WV
- UNIVERSITY OF CHARLESTON
- WEST VIRGINIA WESLEYAN COLLEGE
- WHEELING JESUIT UNIVERSITY

*Many of the two-year programs considered here are closely related to or preparation for the majors listed above. Please note that a four-year degree may be necessary to attain some of these professions.

DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Major. 5.5" x 8.5" folded card, inside spread

MYTH ALERT!

Your college major will not necessarily dictate what you do for the rest of your life. Professions, opportunities, your interests, and your skills will change and adapt over time, which is a good thing! Regardless of which major you choose, taking electives from other areas of study will give you a wider base of knowledge to pull from later. If you know what you want to do, be sure to select the major that will best prepare you for that, but don't be afraid to explore!

SCHOOLS I MIIIIIGHT BE INTERESTED IN: (BASED ON MAJOR)

1.	CAREER	MAJOR(S)	SCHOOLS
2.	CAREER	MAJOR(S)	SCHOOLS
3.	CAREER	MAJOR(S)	SCHOOLS

DIY Guide to the Epic College Decision. Infographic decision-making tool: Major. 5.5" x 8.5" folded card, back cover