

COMPUTERS, COUNSELORS CAN EASE COLLEGE CHOICE

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Students pick colleges by reputation, family tradition or word-of-mouth.

Now comes computer matching.

Using "a blend of art and science," www.destination-u.com compiles a "fit list" of about 15 schools for any student who pays the \$79.95 fee, said Toby Waldorf of Los Angeles, who launched the Web site in September, with 50,000 visitors to date.

From college-search Web sites such as Waldorf's to virtual tours on college Web sites, the Internet can be the first step.

Students who hire Destination-U create a personality profile of needs, interests and aspirations that is matched with data culled from 18,000 interviews with college students and from 1,354 colleges, said Waldorf, who has been in private college-counseling practice for 15 years.

"What we want for all of our kids is to make good matches for themselves and get a great education . . . and graduate on time," she said.

College rankings touted by media outlets have overemphasized a short list of colleges, she said, at a time when most high-school counselors are hard-pressed to give students individual attention.

Time that counselors spend with students on college is well-spent, said Ed Whitfield, associate director of the Ohio Department of Education.

"College selection has typically been one of their strengths," he said. "This is a very popular and important thing for parents."

The state does not ask school districts to conform to a fixed counselor-to-student ratio but does mandate student-support services, which "could be counseling," Whitfield said.

The state also expects five "educational-service personnel" for every 1,000 students. Those are "resource people," including counselors, librarians and fine-arts teachers, he said.

Ohio has a total student-to-counselor ratio of about 489-to-1; the ratio in high school climbs to about 303-to-1.

"The combination of the worry about getting into a top school and then not knowing where to get the right guidance," Waldorf said, "is leaving families very, very stressed."

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