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Finding Right College For You

Web Service Claims To Provide Best Fit

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For high school seniors who haven't yet submitted college applications, and juniors preparing for the process, yet another service has emerged offering help.

Launched in September, Destination-U (destination-u.com) assesses students' academic and social needs and, for \$50, creates a list of 15 colleges and universities based on the student's qualifications, needs and desires.

"When the fit is right, kids are likely to have a successful academic and social experience, and they're likely to do well and mature and graduate on time," says Toby Waldorf, Destination-U founder.

First, students fill out an extensive questionnaire that asks how far away from home they would like to go, how much financial aid they're likely to need, what subjects they're considering as a major, preferred school size, whether they want to be in an urban or suburban area, whether they're shy or outgoing and whether the religions or ethnicity of the student body is important.

Destination-U offers three suggested colleges to start. Paying the \$50 gives students the names of additional schools, including designated "safety" and "reach" schools.

The site includes tips on preparing for the SATs and visiting colleges, as well as tips for parents. Text bubbles pop up with useful information and other stuff that's just interesting, such as the colleges some celebrities have attended. Site users can return many times to refine their search.

Waldorf, who has been a college counselor for 15 years, said she created the site to help students who may not be getting the amount of one-on-one attention they need.

But critics of Destination-U say there are comparable sites that are free to use.

"I don't think you're getting personalized attention from the computer either," says David Stetson, interim coordinator of counseling services at Manchester High School.

He recommends that students use the free search engine available at sites like www.collegeboard.com.

At Manchester High, juniors are taught how to use the Internet to find resources for their college search. They also use a special computer program called Choices to aid in the search.

"It's not a site I would recommend to students and parents, because there's so much free info available," Lee H. Melvin, director of undergraduate admission at the University of Connecticut, says of Destination-U. "You just need to sit down and take your time."

After completing questionnaires for Destination-U and college board.com, I found the former did offer a better list of matches. The Destination-U list suggested several schools that I had applied to when I was in high school, while the collegeboard.com service offered zero matches for me based on the questions I answered.

To create her site, Waldorf says, she asked students to complete an Internet questionnaire sharing what traits made their school a good academic and social match.

"I've found that when the fit is right, kids graduate on time," says Waldorf. "That's something that's happening all too little. Only a third of kids who start graduate in four years. It's a huge financial loss."
