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Surfing To Campus

Can online matching services help students find the perfect college?

By SONJA STEPTOE

It has been said that picking the right college can be as crucial to future success and happiness as picking the right mate. That's essentially the logic behind [Destination-U.com](#), a new online search service for college-bound students. It was developed by Greg Waldorf, a venture capitalist who is on the board of matchmaking service [eHarmony.com](#), and his mother Toby, who for 15 years has been privately advising high schoolers on applying to college. "The recommendations we give are quite personalized — similar to what I do in the office with clients," says Toby.

[Destination-U.com](#) joins a vast array of free and fee-based college-search services available to anxious families during the complex and competitive admissions process. The College Board, for example, straightforwardly profiles more than 3,500 colleges, while the irreverent Princeton Review ranks everything from quality of campus food to tolerance of alternative lifestyles. [Destination-U.com](#) aims to differentiate itself from the pack by tailoring its advice to the applicant's personality. For a one-time fee of \$49.95, it canvasses the student's attitudes on tuition cost, class size, campus setting, social atmosphere, academic environment and a host of other aspects of college life. Armed with those responses, plus SAT scores and GPA, the search engine combs through a database of information on more than 1,300 colleges and, like a matchmaker, finds places that fit the student's preferences.

Some experts are skeptical about would-be college students surfing through the application process. Michael Truschke, Pepperdine University's admissions director, says that although the service may be somewhat useful, it should not be a substitute for firsthand research — visiting campuses and meeting students and faculty. But Gina Antonini, a high school senior from Arlington, Va., liked the recommendations of [Destination-U.com](#) so much that she ditched her guidebooks and applied to the six schools the website suggested. "None of the other sources helped me figure out what kind of schools would fit me as a person," she says. "I found exactly what I was looking for."