

Key Concepts:

avocation vs. vocation
professional development
personal development
marketability

Chapter 2

The Three Main Goals

When all those slick, glossy brochures begin to arrive in your mailbox, maintaining a cool, rational, business approach to the college choice process is difficult. Everything looks so perfect and so desirable. Each admissions packet is deliberately crafted to make you think that days are always sunny, co-eds are always beautiful, faculty are always kind and helpful, and college is four years of basketball, basket weaving and bonding. What's not to like? Less time in classrooms than high school, more options for fun on campus, 24-hour pizza delivery – and no parents.

As lovely as the images may seem, those glossy photos and slick brochures downplay just how hard it is for students to succeed during the college years. From our perspective, success isn't just getting the grades in the classroom; it's getting the degree and making a transition to the real world that won't leave you right back in your parents' house a few years down the road.

It's not the easiest thing to do, but even now, as you are poised at the start of this new adventure, *you have to keep the big picture in mind*. One mistake young people make is that they don't think *strategically* about the college decision. Far too often, students focus a lot of time on the decision of which school or what major. Then, after the pressure of the big choice is over, students get sucked into the day-to-

30 • Making College Pay

day, week-to-week, semester-to-semester rhythm of college and forget about the big picture of why they are there in the first place.

Focusing on just the next step in front of us is how many of us get through life. Keeping an eye on the bigger picture is not what we do. It doesn't help that college life is broken down into chunks that make it so easy to focus on the short run. Semesters, football season, basketball season, homecoming, spring fling – you move from one thing to the other. Trust us, in college, there is always something to do. It's hard to keep the big picture in mind when there is so much to distract you every day. This is why it is important for you to visualize what you want your future to look like *before* you ever set foot on campus. Now, this doesn't mean that you should expect your future to look exactly like what you envisioned. Life doesn't work that way. But if you and your family can think through some of the big-picture issues now, *before* you make a commitment, *before* you “fall in love” with a pretty campus, *before* your parents add a second mortgage to the house, you can improve the odds that your college investment will be a good one.

In general, you should have three core goals for your college experience: Minimize costs. Increase marketability. Improve the likelihood of graduation. Whatever choice you make about where to go and what to study, consider how your decisions and actions will help or hinder your progress toward accomplishing these three goals.