



You might feel that you should attend a college for its name, but if you won't be happy there, you won't thrive.

My high school counselor warned everyone in my class not to get attached to any one school and to have a lot of safeties on our list. So I applied to 20 colleges. It was so much work!

Crushin' on Chicago

I picked most of the schools on my list based on their reputations and research programs, and on what I heard about them from my friends. I also worked with a private counselor who helped me assess which schools I'd like the best. I knew I wanted a college that would push me outside of my comfort zone—not just academically, but socially. I wanted to be around different kinds of people in a community bigger than my small, private Christian high school.

I really liked the idea of going to University of Chicago. It was prestigious and the thought of living in such an exciting city in a completely different part of the country was thrilling. Since it was so highly ranked, I felt that if I got in, I would definitely go there. I applied for an early action decision and was deferred. Because I'm the type of person who keeps pushing until the very end, the deferral just motivated me to try harder to get in.

One college visit changes everything

I visited U-Chicago after my deferral, adamant that I would make myself stand out to admissions. But after spending time on campus, it didn't click. The school was gorgeous, but I didn't connect with the students or feel comfortable there. Plus, it was freezing cold outside. I was so disappointed. I thought I had found my "dream school," but now I was worried that it wasn't for me. On the same day, I visited two other schools in Illinois, Wheaton and Northwestern, but by then, I was in a bad mood. My hands were numb, and I just wanted to go home.

Despite being disappointed with U-Chicago, I sent admissions my improved ACT scores and a letter expressing my interest. I still wanted to get in, just to prove to myself that I could. I also thought that, maybe, after I got in, I would end up liking it.

Hometown: San Diego, CA
High School: Private
GPA: 4.0/4.83 (weighted)
ACT: 34
Major: Biochemistry
Goal: Prepare for medical school, join an acapella group, and make new friends

College	Status
Northwestern University	Attending
Baylor University (EA)	Accepted
Boston College	Accepted
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo	Accepted
Chapman University	Accepted
Southern Methodist University	Accepted
Stanford University	Denied
Texas Christian University	Accepted
Tulane University	Denied
UC Berkeley	Accepted
UC Davis	Accepted
UCLA	Accepted
UC San Diego	Accepted
UC Santa Barbara	Accepted
University of Chicago	Accepted
University of Southern California	Accepted

Northwestern takes the lead

I was shocked to get into 17 of my 20 schools, including University of Chicago with a substantial scholarship! Now I had to narrow down my list. As I researched the colleges further, Northwestern's science department stood out. I saw how broad the offerings were, giving me flexibility to explore different areas of science. It also had an excellent journalism school, which is another subject that interests me, and the big sports teams.

So I went back to Northwestern for a second visit—and it was WAY more appealing! I met faculty and students, and saw the super cute college town. I learned about all the different activities and clubs available. It was not as cold as the last time I was there (plus I was more prepared jacket-wise) so I could really look at the campus, which was beautiful. Best of all, the students I met were very similar to me—they liked to work hard, but also have fun. Northwestern had everything I wanted.

My ups and downs

The only problem was that Northwestern didn't offer me any merit aid. So it was hard to choose it over the other schools that were offering me scholarships. I wondered if I should attend U-Chicago since it was giving me such a large scholarship. I visited again, just to be sure, but Northwestern had stolen my heart. Even with U-Chicago's great reputation and rankings, I knew it just wasn't the school for me.

To my relief, my parents said it would be okay to go to Northwestern. They felt since I would be happy there, it was the best academic investment.

What I learned

I wish I had backed up my computer! It crashed and I lost all of my essays. Luckily, it happened after I had sent in my applications, but I could have used the essays when I applied for scholarships.

The money factor

My parents are paying for college. Eventually, I hope to become a resident advisor (RA), which will reduce my housing costs.

My advice

Applying to college is a lot of work. You really have to make yourself known to admission officers by showing your interest. Tell them the things you like about their school, and do the college interviews. Finally, you might feel that you should attend a college for its name, but if you won't be happy there, you won't thrive.

Vanderbilt University	Accepted
Wake Forest University	Accepted
Wheaton College	Accepted
Yale University	Denied

Freshman Year Update

The hardest part of starting college was being so far from my parents. Especially when I got sick with the flu, and they weren't there to pick up my prescription or bring me Gatorade. I had to become an adult and take care of myself. Living in a dorm was weird at first, too, but it gradually felt like home as I made friends and spent more time there.

The biggest adjustment has been the cold weather. It kills my motivation. During sorority rush it was -15 degrees, and we had to be outside in dresses and heels!

Northwestern is definitely stretching me academically. I spend hours more time studying, and I don't always get the high grades I'm used to, but I think this is making me a better student. I'm now majoring in neuroscience, and this summer I'm going to Nicaragua to work in a health clinic.