

Help Your Teen Find Their College Fit

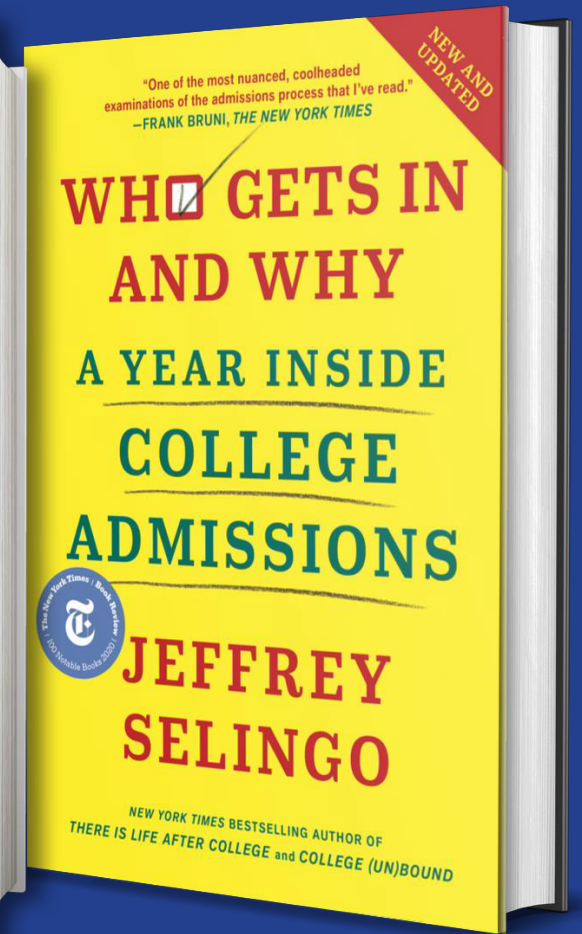
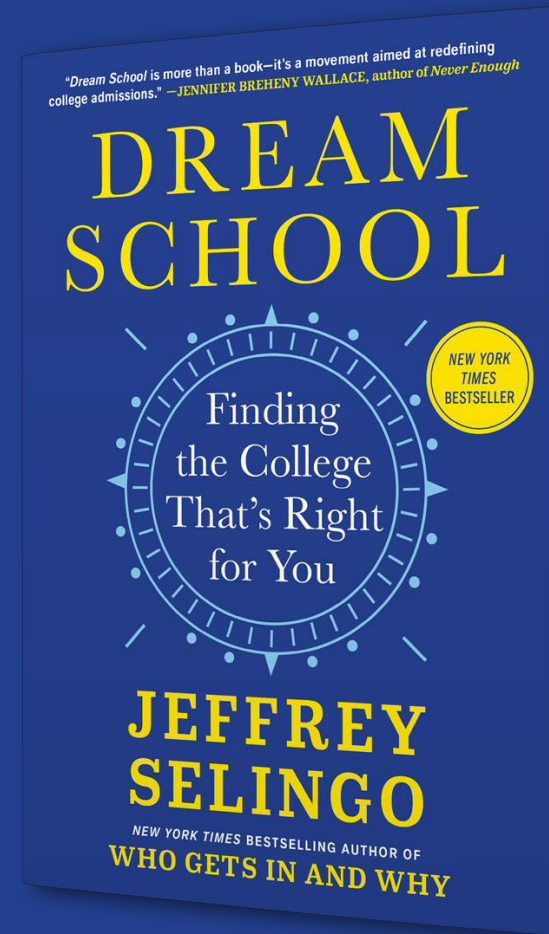
A Conversation With Jeff Selingo

September 29, 2026

8:00 PM ET | 7:00 PM CT | 5:00 PM PT



Finding *Your* Dream School



/jselingo



/JeffSelingo



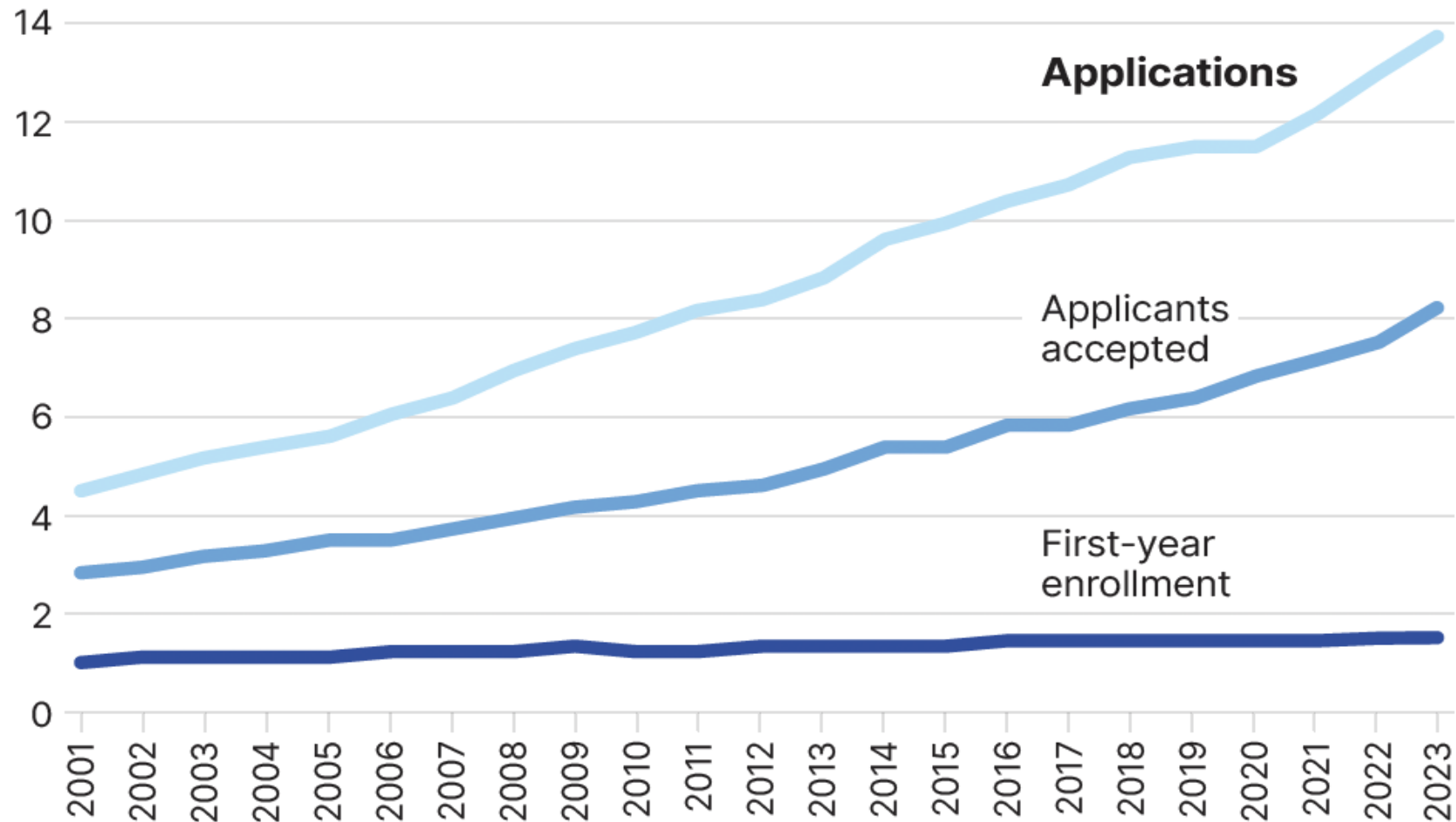
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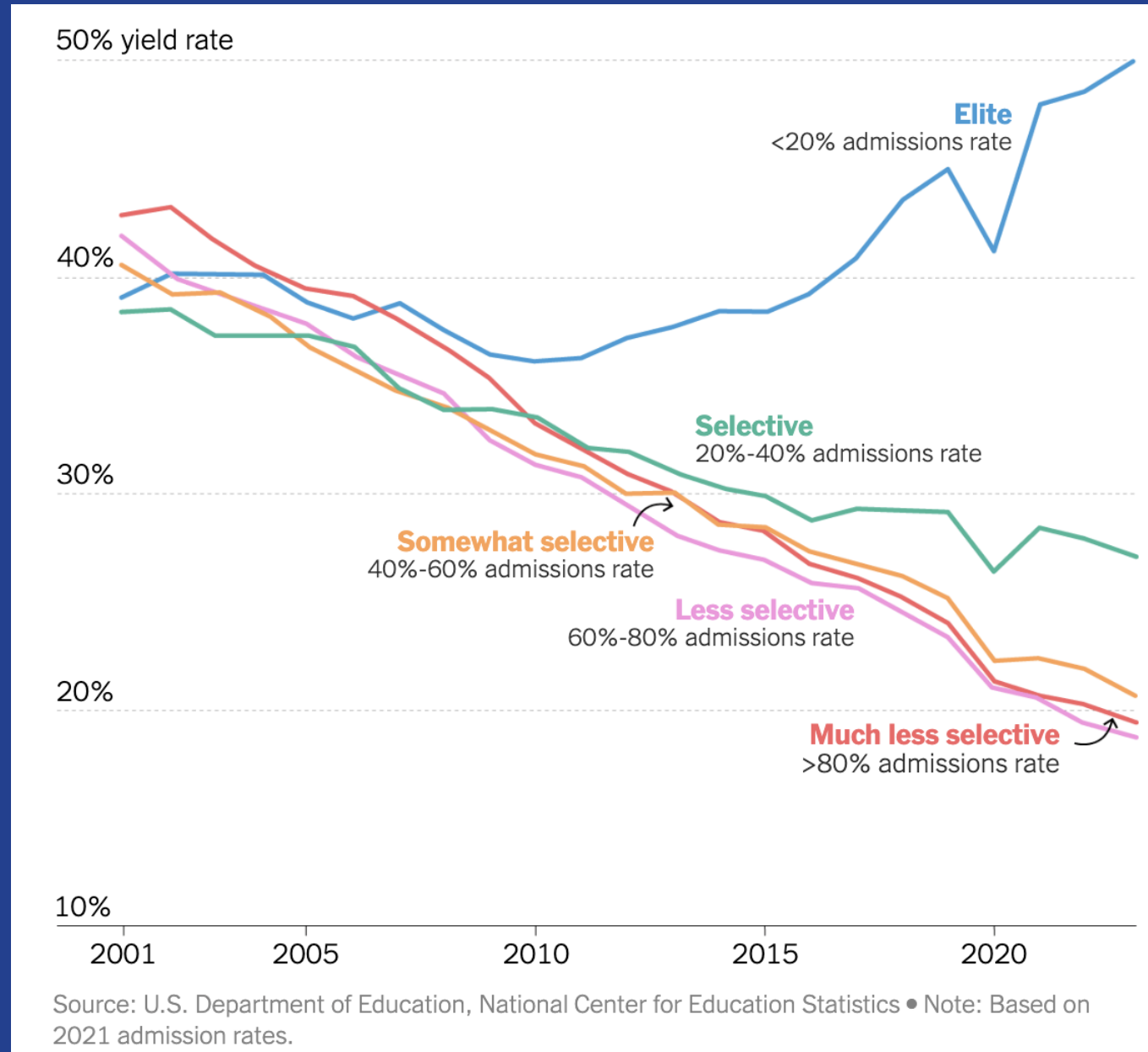
The New York Times			
Best Sellers Advice, How-To & Misc. and Monthly			
THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Advice, How-to and Miscellaneous	WEEKS ON LIST
7		DREAM SCHOOL , by Jeffrey Selingo. (Scribner) (+)	1
8		NOBODY WANTS YOUR SH*T , by Messie Condo. (Skyhorse)	2
9		IT DOESN'T HAVE TO HURT , by Sanjay Gupta. (Simon & Schuster)	2

Applications tripled since '01. But to many of same colleges.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

Selectivity measures popularity, not quality.



Students are just as happy at colleges that admit most applicants.

The New York Times

OPINION
GUEST ESSAY

The College Game Is Changing. It's Still Rigged.

Sept. 22, 2025, 5:02 a.m. ET



By Jeffrey Selingo

Mr. Selingo is the author of [“Dream School: Finding the College That’s Right for You.”](#)

Overall satisfaction with the college

Share of seniors who are highly satisfied, by college acceptance rate

Elite colleges

<20% admitted



Selective

20–40% admitted



Somewhat selective

40–60% admitted



Less selective

60–80% admitted



Much less selective

80–100% admitted



Source: National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017–2023; 975 institutions. Category names by author.

The classroom barely changes with selectivity.

Elite colleges
Selective
Somewhat selective
Less selective
Much less selective

Acceptance rate

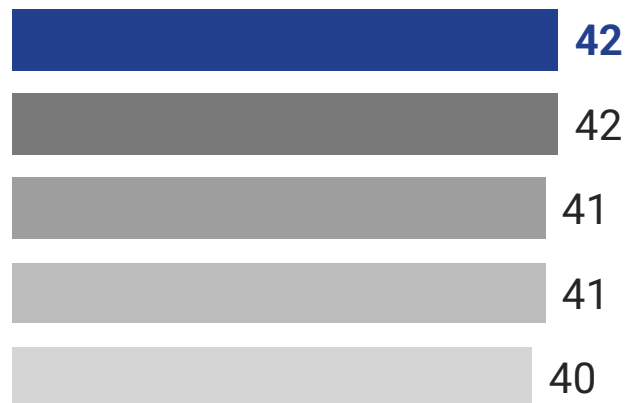
<20%
20–40%
40–60%
60–80%
80–100%

What college seniors say

Critical thinking

How much courses emphasized critical and analytical thinking

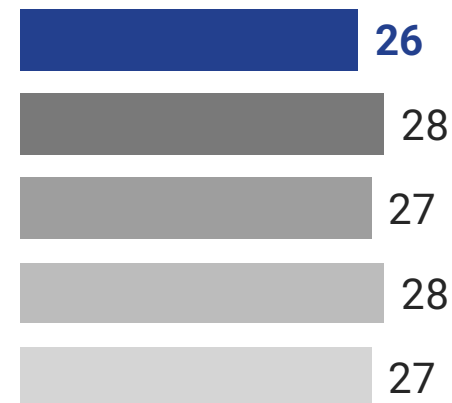
Score, 0–60 scale



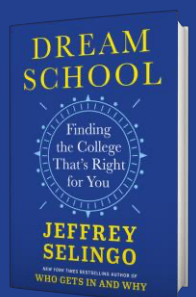
Time with faculty

How often students worked with professors outside of class

Score, 0–60 scale



Source: Composite findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017–2023; 975 institutions. Category names by author.



The gap in experience isn't in the classroom. It's experiential learning.

Elite colleges	
Selective	
Somewhat selective	
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Acceptance rate

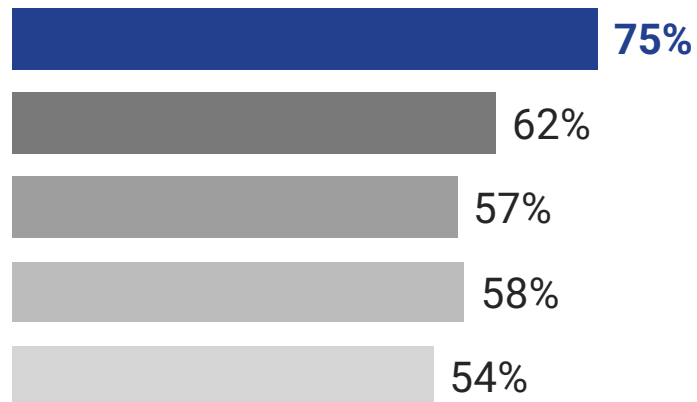
<20%
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What college seniors did while there

Completed an internship

Seniors who held at least one internship during college

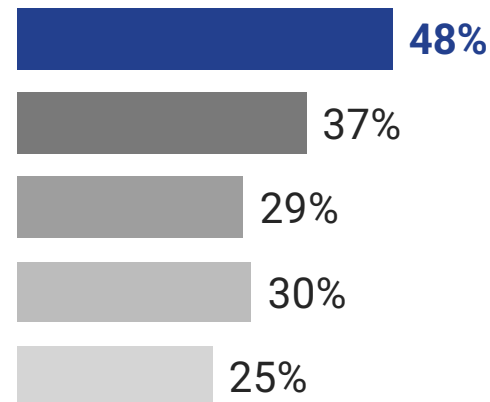
Share of seniors



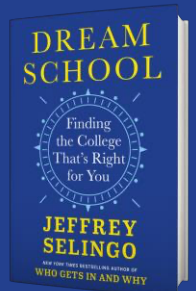
Research with a professor

Seniors who worked on a research project with faculty

Share of seniors



Source: Composite findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017–2023; 975 institutions. Category names by author.



And, yes, Fortune 50 employers hire from everywhere.

The Elite College Myth

Panicky parents often think their children's success in life depends on going to a prestigious school. In reality, there are many paths to achieving great things.



WSJ

College
Acceptance
Rate

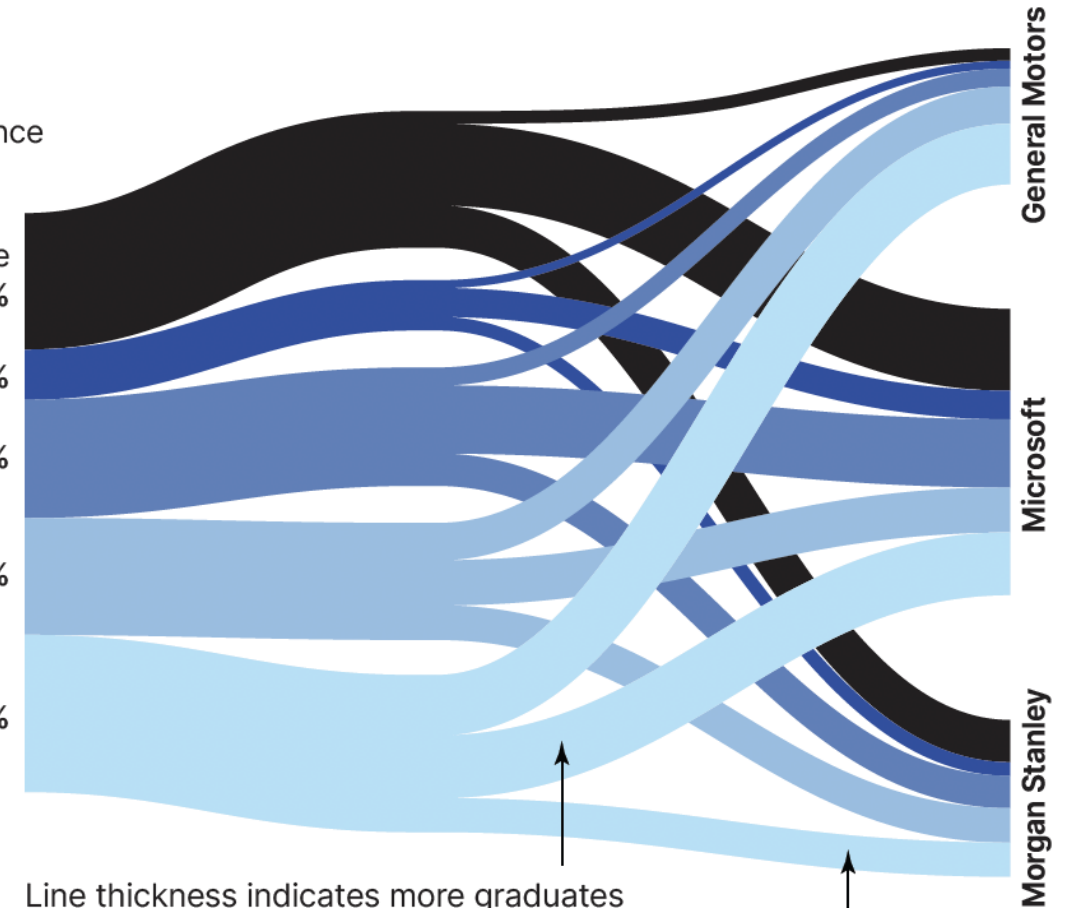
Elite
0-20%

20-40%

40-60%

60-80%

80-100%



Line thickness indicates more graduates when thicker, and fewer when thinner.

Note: Includes people whose most advanced degree was a bachelor's completed between 2017 - 2023, from 1,241 institutions in these selectivity bands.

Source: Lightcast, 2024

Finding *Your* Dream School: What To Look For

1 A supportive start

A full first-year experience, not just orientation: intro-to-college courses, learning-living experiences, and early academic and career advising.

2 Easy connections

On a tour, watch how students find each other. Are faculty accessible outside class? Do full-time professors teach the intro courses?

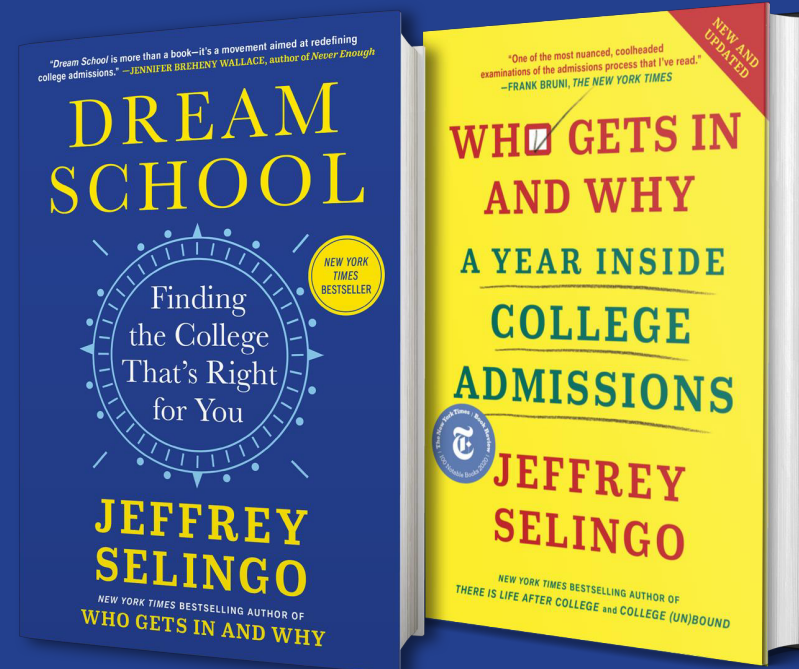
3 Real job experience

Hands-on learning tied to careers: internships, co-ops, undergraduate research, and skills-based credentials beyond the degree.

4 A good ROI: value over prestige

Compare your NET price — not the sticker price — over four years against your potential earnings.

Q&A



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You've got questions. We've got answers.



Find resources for college and career planning at bigfuture.org/community.



Watch short videos that answer questions fast.



Read articles packed with expert advice.



Get tips for your teen's college and career planning.



Explore tools that help you plan every step, together.