

Finding Your College Fit in Indiana

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

“Finding Your College Fit in Indiana” is a creative project that takes the form of a website. The purpose of this website is to help Indiana high school and college students make more informed decisions regarding various college-related choices. The project explores reasons to attend or not attend college, weighing different costs with the financial, social, spiritual, and cultural benefits. The project also details a multitude of factors that prospective students should consider when finding the right school for them, including their best-fit area of study, type of institution to attend, what different institutions have to offer, financing options available to cover the costs of education, an analysis of the financial implications of attending various Indiana institutions and how this compares with future earnings for the desired career outcome, the location and distance of Indiana institutions, and an overview of 44 four-year institutions and eight community colleges in Indiana. Finally, the website provides five alternatives to attending college for viewers who choose not to go to college. The creative project compiles many sources and tools to create a website that assists in various college decisions that high school and early college students may face.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Emily Rutter for advising me throughout the development of this website. Her advice and support were instrumental every step of the way as I completed the website as my Honors Senior Project.

I am also grateful to my family for their continuous support throughout the creation of the project.

Process Analysis Statement

At the beginning of 2020, like many high school seniors, I was tasked with figuring out what I wanted to do upon graduation. Should I attend college? If so, what am I interested in studying? What higher learning institution is best suited for me? Or if I do not plan to attend college, what are my alternatives? Most significantly, where do I begin with this entire process? With so many institutions and areas of study to choose from, I experienced information overload and ultimately made a less informed decision than I could have. Fortunately, I made the correct selection based on what I needed by choosing Ball State University, and I am continuously thankful to my younger self for the decision. However, I could have made my decision more confidently with better, more organized information. For my Honors Senior Project, I created *Finding Your College Fit in Indiana*, a website designed to help Indiana high school and college students avoid the experience I faced in 2020.

When I first began this project, my focus was analyzing the financial implications of attending different Indiana institutions and pursuing various careers. My goal was to study how long it would take to pay off your college expenses depending on where you enroll and what career you intend to pursue. However, after discussing the project with Dr. Rutter and researching various considerations regarding whether or not to attend college, this idea became a website with goals beyond a purely financial perspective and instead spanning into social, spiritual, and cultural perspectives in addition to the economic view.

My website includes three main components, each aiming to help viewers tackle a specific decision. The first decision is whether or not to attend college. To help with this decision, I begin by outlining the short-term versus long-term outlook of college. In the short term, college may appear to be expensive and a lengthy time commitment. However, instead of

viewing college in the short term, it should be considered as a long-term investment. Beyond the comparison of college from short-term and long-term views, I outline the benefits and costs of college in this section. To compile useful information for viewers, I cast a wide net in my research. I reviewed a multitude of sources, ultimately drawing from six different sources as I compiled the benefits and costs of college. For benefits, I wanted to emphasize how college holds more than just the financial benefit of future earnings and other career-related opportunities. Therefore, I broke down the information I found into four perspectives: financial, social, spiritual, and cultural, revealing a more holistic view of the potential benefits of college. However, college is not necessarily the right choice for everyone. Therefore, it was important to detail the costs associated with college so that viewers can analyze these costs and benefits and determine if college is the right fit for them and their plans for the future.

The second decision is where and what to study. To aid in this decision, I created seven web pages dedicated to different components of this decision. The first component is the best-fit area of study and which Indiana institutions offer this area of study. This section includes a compilation of tips from five sources regarding practices to perform and avoid when selecting a major. Additionally, I have provided links to seven outside sources that have produced quizzes designed to help students brainstorm potential majors that may fit their preferences and personalities. Finally, this component includes an embedded Excel file wherein users can input their desired major or majors. The Excel file will return the Indiana institutions that offer these areas of study. The next component is a comparison between community colleges and four-year institutions. In addition to analyzing the key differences between the two, this page includes an embedded Excel file with a list of eight community colleges in Indiana. Users can click the various colleges and explore the areas of study each community college offers. The third

component describes six potential benefits offered by different institutions that students should consider when deciding which university to attend. Another component of this decision discusses financing options that can help alleviate the high tuition costs. The College Profitability Calculator, an embedded Excel file I created to analyze the education expenses versus future earnings, is the fifth component of this decision. This Excel file utilized tuition information and median pay for various careers. The sixth web page discusses the location of Indiana institutions and provides a link to a Google spreadsheet that users can download. Users can input their starting location. Formulas will then reveal the distance of each institution to this location. Finally, the seventh component provides an overview of 44 four-year institutions and eight community colleges in Indiana. This web page is the final one-stop shop users can access via an embedded Excel spreadsheet to view some quick facts about different institutions.

The third decision is what alternatives to pursue if college is not correct for you. A final web page describes five potential options for those not attending college to consider. Each alternative is defined using research from expert sources. Numerous options include examples with links to additional sources users can explore further.

Throughout the creation of this project, I learned a lot about the development of a website, the application of Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets, information regarding the difficult college decisions I aimed to explain, and myself. Before beginning my creative project, I had never really created a website before. I chose to use Google Sites as it is an easily accessible option that does not have any fees. From here, it was a very circular process of creating pages, adjusting pages, discovering new tools, and readjusting formatting. By going through the experience of creating a website and embedding Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets into various web pages, I gained communication, critical thinking, and technology skills. To create a

meaningful and successful website, I needed to focus on the communication of my message. In exploring this communication, I learned how to effectively communicate on a website by arranging information in a way that will retain viewers' attention and keep them from leaving the website prematurely. I gained critical thinking skills as a lot of my planning process involved developing an outline of what kind of information viewers would find valuable on my website. Ultimately, I had to make decisions regarding what information to include and where to place it to make a cohesive project. Additionally, I expanded my critical thinking skills further by finding more efficient methods of data collection in Microsoft Excel through the use of new formulas and functions. Finally, by developing a website for the first time and expanding Excel techniques, I gained technology skills as I learned how to use Google Sites, how to embed information into the website, and how to adjust code to make the final product.

Aside from learning about the technological components, I also learned insights about the subject matter and myself. I gained critical thinking skills as I researched components of college decision-making and determined what information to explore further. Additionally, I improved my self-development skills as I had the opportunity to plan and execute the extensive process required for any Honors Senior Project. I learned about my strengths of perseverance and decision-making regarding information to include on the website. I also learned about my weaknesses. One such weakness is initial organizational planning. Before this project, I had always considered planning a strength of mine. However, this project revealed that I should improve this skill further because I often found myself jumping into tasks for the project before they were properly thought through and, as a result, had to backtrack and redo different tasks. These weaknesses are something I worked on as I identified them in the project and am excited to continue to work on these skills beyond the completion of my project.

Three and a half years ago, when I realized I would be creating an Honors Senior Project, I did not know what to expect. I had no idea what topic I would choose and did not fully believe I had the skills to create a project of this magnitude. However, as I complete my project, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to complete a thesis project I could learn from and ultimately be proud of.

Creative Project Link:

<https://sites.google.com/view/findingyourcollegefitindiana>

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