

Hi, my name is Gina Barteletti and I'm a 2007 Earlham College graduate. (Earlham is in Richmond, IN for those of you unsure). I've been living in Seattle ever since graduation and have worked for two non-profit groups. Last year I worked for Heart of America NW, an environmental non-profit, as part of the Lutheran Volunteer Corps, and I recently began working for the Northwest Environmental Education Council as part of Americorps.

My process of applying to and choosing a college changed a lot from beginning to end. When I initially began searching for colleges I never considered going to a school in the Midwest. Although location wasn't very important to me, being from the Pacific Northwest originally, it never crossed my mind to look at options elsewhere. I also really didn't understand the types of schools out there. For instance, liberal arts colleges vs. universities vs. private colleges. I didn't understand what each type was, the differences, and the benefits of each. I was just excited to find a college that I could get into and to move on from high school.

I was excited about going to college because I didn't have a very positive, overall high school experience socially or academically. My grades were fairly average freshman and sophomore year, and I struggled to stay focused on academics because I had a hard time staying interested in the subjects I was learning. I also didn't feel like my personality jibed with the majority of my classmates. I was more introverted, interested in the arts and, as time went on, really interested in social justice issues. So, even though I was in a private (and therefore smaller) high school, I found myself fairly lonely for the majority of high school and often lost in the crowd.

I viewed going to college as a new opportunity to meet people with like-minded values and interests, with whom I could not only create meaningful friendships, but also build community with. I also looked at college as a way to explore education more experientially. Following a strict and structured, in-classroom curriculum was part of my struggle to remain focused in high school.

However, I was afraid that even if I were to find a college with each of these aspects that I wouldn't be accepted because of my average academic performance my first two years of high school and my difficulty achieving decent scores on standardized tests such as the SAT and the ACT. So my initial search ignored what I was really hoping to get out of my college experience, i.e. experiential learning, academic emphasis on social justice, and community building, and focused more on where I could get in based solely on the standards of test scores and transcripts. This left me feeling dissatisfied with my options and fearful that I'd end up in a situation similar to my high school experience. I felt that because I hadn't excelled academically as a high school student and struggled with standardized tests that I had exhausted my avenues for getting into a college of my choice.

Fortunately I have a wonderful stepmother and mother, who both suggested that I read the book "Colleges That Change Lives," and think about some of the smaller, lesser known schools, in areas of the country I had not previously considered. I did, and after reading the description of several, it confirmed for me that based on my introverted personality, desire to build community, work toward social justice, and engage in experiential learning, I needed to go to a smaller, liberal arts College. At this point my college search became more focused on where I'd be the most happy and less focused on my transcripts and test scores. Name recognition was never important to me, because I knew that my college experience would be

the most positive if I focused on my well-being and happiness more so than on how many people had heard of the school I attended.

So the summer before my senior year, my stepmother and I flew to the Midwest, where most of the schools I was interested in were located, and had tours and interviews at each. Ironically Earlham was not on the list. After each visit, I still felt confident that I wanted to attend a small, liberal arts college, but I never had a gut feeling about any of the ones I visited. Around this time, I received an invitation to interview with Jeff Rickey at Earlham during one of his trips to the Pacific NW. I reread the description of Earlham in the “Colleges That Change Lives” book and felt really confident that I wanted to have an interview.

That interview is what sold me on the school. The interview was very personal and I felt that who I was as a person—my interests, values, and most importantly, my hopes for my college education—were really heard. We discussed them in depth. I felt as though Jeff made a great effort not only to get to know me, but to understand why my test scores and transcripts looked as they did. After this interview I decided that Earlham was my number one choice. I also got the impression that Earlham was interested in me and thought that based on who I was as a person, I would be a good fit for their community. And that’s how I ended up at Earlham and I was more than pleased with my four years there.

My most meaningful, thought-provoking, and enjoyable academic experiences took place outside the classroom on a study-abroad trip to Tanzania. The school’s commitment to social justice has led me down current career paths that I feel blessed to have found and that are helping direct future career and academic goals. But most importantly, I felt that I was a part of a strong and thoughtful community of people with whom to this day I remain close.

Now this is not to say that Earlham is the best school in “Colleges That Change Lives” or that “Colleges That Change Lives” is the best book of this nature. This is just to say that Earlham was the best fit for me and I would not have found it without this book. It characterizes each school, providing a thorough description emphasizing the feel of the school and the types of students and faculty comprising the community, rather than just providing statistics.

So to sum up, what I learned from my college search is that there are lots of schools out there that consider students beyond what just test scores, essays, and transcripts can tell them. There are schools out there with admissions counselors who really want to find individuals who will help make their colleges’ community stronger. And that same community could also help a student find his or her niche and thrive.

Thank you.