



Lesson Plan

Exploring Colleges on BigFuture

For Advisory Periods or Any Class Time for Postsecondary Planning

Overview

- In this lesson, students will explore colleges, begin to build a list of 6 or more colleges and become eligible for a chance to earn a \$500 or \$40,000 scholarship through BigFuture®.
- [Research](#) shows that applying to multiple colleges increases students' chances of enrolling in a 4-year college. Many students don't explore colleges broadly enough and undermatch in their college choice, meaning they choose a college that's not well aligned to their academic achievement.¹
- There are 2 versions of this lesson. Version A includes teacher-led discussion about the range of factors that students can consider when exploring colleges. Version B takes less time but focuses less on building background knowledge.

Target Students & Timing

Class of 2024: Spring, and summer of 2023

Class of 2025: Spring, Summer, and fall of 2023, spring of 2024

Timing

Version A: 30 minutes

Version B: 15 minutes

Objectives

Students will:

- Understand what factors to consider when determining which colleges might be a good social, financial, and academic fit.
- Search colleges on BigFuture by a range of factors and begin to build a personalized list of 6 or more colleges to increase their chances of finding a college that's a good fit for them.
- Automatically earn entries into monthly drawings for \$500 and \$40,000 scholarships from BigFuture.

Before the Lesson

1. Ensure every student has access to a computer, tablet or device with internet access.
2. Before class, ask students to bring the username and password for their College Board account.
3. Prepare to show the following website and videos:
 - [BigFuture College Search](#)

¹ According to research from [Smith, Pender, & Howell](#) (2013) and [Hoxby and Avery](#) (2013), the vast majority of students with a lower socioeconomic status (SES) don't even apply to colleges that are a good academic fit for them. Attending the right college can mean more financial aid, [graduating](#), and [getting paid more](#) after college.



- [How to Plan for College on BigFuture](#)
- [How to Earn BigFuture Scholarships](#)
- *Optional:* [Winner stories](#)

Version A: Lesson Steps (Total time: About 30 minutes)

- 1. Anticipatory Set (5 minutes):** Ask students to discuss or write about the following questions:
 - What are your goals for life after high school?
 - What is your dream job and what type of education does it require?
 - If you are thinking of attending college, what are some of the things you are considering when deciding which colleges to apply to?
 - Overall, how do you feel about the process to plan and prepare for college?
- 2. Introduction (5 minutes):** Ask a few students to share their reflections. Then, frame the purpose and objectives of this lesson. Key points to make:
 - Planning for life after high school is important and filled with many decisions. You're not alone if you don't know where to start.
 - It's important to consider a range of factors, including what you mentioned, when searching for colleges. Many students don't explore colleges broadly enough, missing schools that could be a great, unique fit for them.
 - To help you focus your college search, today, we'll look at factors you can consider when looking for colleges that are a good social, financial, and academic fit.
 - Today, you'll start to build a list of 6 or more colleges on BigFuture that you're interested in.
 - By completing this step, you'll automatically be entered into a drawing for monthly \$500 and \$40,000 BigFuture Scholarships. If you don't win this month, your entries will roll over for future, monthly drawings through February of your senior year.
- 3. BigFuture Scholarships (Less than 5 minutes):** Tell students about how to earn scholarships from BigFuture. Show this [video](#) and stress these key points.
 - BigFuture is a free online planning guide that helps all students take the right first step after high school.
 - By completing specific steps on their BigFuture dashboard, students will earn chances to win monthly \$500 and \$40,000 scholarships.
 - BigFuture Scholarships are open to all sophomores and juniors and recognize steps you take to plan for life after high school. The more steps you take and the earlier you begin on BigFuture, the more chances you have at \$500 and \$40,000 awards every month.
 - In 2023, BigFuture will award over \$3 million in scholarships to more than 3,600 students
 - At least half of all scholarships—\$1.5 million per year—will be awarded to students whose families earn less than \$60,000 a year.
 - Today we'll focus on the Build Your College List step on the dashboard.
- 4. Modeling: Build Your College List (5 minutes):** To frame the steps to build a college list, show this [introductory video](#). Guide the class to brainstorm a short list of factors that they can consider in looking for a college. Discuss why these matter. Then, show the [college search page](#) on BigFuture.



- When you create a college list, examples of factors to consider include size, location, available majors and classes, graduation rate, available extracurricular activities, distance from home, financial aid and expected cost, selectivity, graduation rate, makeup of the student body, housing options, and campus atmosphere.
- When you search for colleges on BigFuture, you can filter by options such as location, majors, type of institution (e.g., 2-year or 4-year, public or private), size, and available activities.

5. Learning Activity: College Exploration (10 minutes): Have students work individually or in pairs and log in to BigFuture using their College Board username and password. From their dashboard, students should go to the Plan for College section, and find the Build Your College List task card. Once they click **Find Colleges**, students will be able to begin their college searches on BigFuture.

- Try to explore colleges using a range of factors. You can find colleges you may not have otherwise considered.
- You can add schools that interest you to your list. To be eligible for the monthly scholarship, you must add 6 or more schools to your list.
- Once your list is complete, you can click **share** and send the link to me, your parent/guardian, or other caring adult in your life!

6. Summary (Less than 5 minutes): At the end of the lesson, ask a few students to share an example of a college or university they added, especially if there's a school that they'd not previously considered, and what factors they considered. (*Optional: Show the [video](#) about scholarship winners.*) Stress these key points:

- As soon as you finish building a list with 6 or more colleges, you're automatically eligible for chance at a \$500 scholarship. The earlier you add 6 schools, the more chances to earn a scholarship.
- If you don't win this month, your entries will roll over for future, monthly drawings until February of your senior year.
- You can also complete other steps on your BigFuture dashboard, such as starting a career list. The more steps you complete, the more entries you'll earn.

Version B: Lesson Steps (Total time: About 15 minutes)

1. Introduction (Less than 5 minutes): Frame the purpose and objectives of this activity. Key points to make:

- Planning for college is important and filled with many decisions. It's important to consider a range of factors when searching for colleges. Many students don't explore colleges broadly enough, missing schools that could be a great, unique fit for them.
- Today, you'll start to build a list of six or more colleges on BigFuture.

2. BigFuture Scholarships (Less than 5 minutes): Tell students about how to earn scholarships from BigFuture. Show this [video](#) and stress these key points.

- BigFuture is a free online planning guide that helps all students take the right first step after high school.
- By completing specific steps on their BigFuture dashboard, students will earn chances to win monthly \$500 and \$40,000 scholarships.



- BigFuture Scholarships are open to all sophomores and juniors and recognize steps you take to plan for life after high school. The more steps you take and the earlier you begin on BigFuture, the more chances you have at \$500 and \$40,000 awards every month.
 - In 2023, BigFuture will award over \$3 million in scholarships to more than 3,600 students
 - At least half of all scholarships—\$1.5 million per year—will be awarded to students whose families earn less than \$60,000 a year.
 - Today we'll focus on the Build Your College List step on the dashboard.
- 3. Beginning College Exploration (5+ minutes):** Have students work individually or in pairs and log in to BigFuture using their College Board username and password. From their dashboard, students should go to the Plan for College section, and find the Build Your College List task card. Once they click **Find Colleges** students will be able to begin their college searches on BigFuture.
- Try to explore colleges using a range of factors. You should find colleges you may not have otherwise considered.
 - You can add schools that interest you to your list. To be eligible for the scholarship, you must add 6 or more schools to your list.
 - Once your list is complete, you can click **share** and send the link to me, your parent/guardian, or other caring adult in your life!
- 4. Summary (Less than 5 minutes):** Stress these key points:
- **Shareout:** Ask 3-5 students to share 1 school that they didn't know about but added to their list today.
 - As soon as you finish building a list with 6 or more colleges, you're automatically eligible for a chance at \$500 and \$40,000 scholarships. The earlier you add 6 schools, the more chances to earn a scholarship.
 - If you don't win this month, your entries will roll over for future, monthly drawings until February of your senior year.
 - You can also complete other steps on your BigFuture dashboard, such as starting a career list. The more steps you complete, the more entries you'll earn.

If you use this lesson plan, please give us [feedback!](#)