1. Introduce myself
2. This presentation is about the whole process of applying to a QuestBridge college – from selecting where to apply to, to submitting the best application possible.
AGENDA

1. Finding the right college fit
   Think about what college characteristics are important to you as you decide where to apply.

2. How applications are evaluated
   Understand how admissions officers review the various components of college applications and what they are looking for.

The workshop will be divided into two parts:
1. How to find the college that is right for you
2. How applications are evaluated
All of the 39 QuestBridge college partners are excellent schools that are committed to financially supporting low-income students. However, there are many differences between the 39 schools. Those differences mean that some of the schools might be a great fit for you – while others might not.

This concept of “fit” is really important. You want to wind up at the school that has the characteristics, community, and academics that are the best fit with your personality. It makes far more sense to do your research and have a good fit than to slack on research and find out that the college isn’t what you expected once you arrive on campus.

As you begin to think about applying to these schools, you’ll want to do your research to find which schools you want to concentrate on applying to. In order to help you get started with that research, we’re going to cover some factors you might want to think about.
IN YOUR BINDERS...

How to use the “College Fit Worksheet”
(at the end of the “Applying to QuestBridge College Partners” section)

1. Section One – Take note of the characteristics that are important to you, and your personal preferences.
2. Section Two – List your top three college “must-haves.”
3. Section Three – Use to pose questions to admissions officers!

Before we talk more about different fit factors, take a minute to turn to the “College Fit Worksheet” in your binder.

During this presentation, fill out sections one and two. Later, you can use section three to ask great questions at the College Fair.
The first thing that you should keep in mind is that all QuestBridge schools are among the top colleges in the country. When you’re deciding which ones you want to apply to, you should be thinking about the place where you will thrive, not how the schools are ranked. You’re deciding where you want to spend the next four years of your life – it’s very important to focus on finding a college that matches your learning style and has a community you want to be part of.
Often you hear about two primary types of four-year colleges:

1. **Liberal arts colleges**
   - Focus primarily (or exclusively) on undergraduate education. This means they usually don’t have any graduate students on campus (although there are some exceptions).
   - Focus on arts, humanities, and sciences. Many people assume that liberal arts colleges don’t offer biology or math majors – that’s not true! Remember to look at the courses and degrees offered before making assumptions.

2. **Research universities**
   - Wide range of academic and professional programs. These schools often offer degrees that are tied to a specific career path, such as journalism, business, and engineering.
   - Professors are generally all involved in research of some sort, in addition to teaching classes.

However, keep in mind, each school is unique. Many schools do not easily fall into either category. Instead, you want to look at specific characteristics, such as:

- Research opportunities available
- Focus on undergraduate education (who’s teaching the classes?)
- Degree programs available
One factor to consider in your college search is size. The QuestBridge college partners range in size from 950 to 18,000 undergraduate students. That’s a very big difference, so it’s important for you to think about where you’d feel the most comfortable! Here are some things to take into consideration:

1. **Personal learning style**
   - What type of environment do you learn best in?
   - Are you comfortable being a little fish in a big pond, or would you prefer to be a big fish in a little pond?

2. **Level of individual attention available**
   - This actually doesn’t always correspond with school size. You can look for numbers such as student-to-faculty ratio to see how much individual attention will be available to you.

3. **Average classroom size**
   - Similar to the student-to-faculty ratio, you should look at the average classroom size to get a feel for what your everyday experience might be like.

4. **Academic and social opportunities available**
   - Larger schools might have a greater variety of student groups for you to get involved in and more social opportunities as a whole.
   - However, small schools might offer the opportunity for you to have greater
involvement in the groups that do exist, or more opportunities to start or lead your own group.

5. **Knowing everyone or always meeting new people**
   - What school environment would be a better fit for your personality?
Location is another factor to consider when researching colleges. You can see on this map that QuestBridge college partners are scattered all across the United States – so you have plenty of options!

A few things to consider are:

1. **Urban, suburban, or small town**
   - The atmosphere of college campuses varies a lot depending on their setting.

2. **Nearby area and/or metropolitan areas**
   - While colleges located in the heart of a city can be attractive, don’t forget about colleges that are near those metropolitan areas and easily accessible via public or school-provided transportation.
   - Additionally, if you’re really interested in a certain outdoor sport or activity, it is worth looking nearby the college to see if that is available – even though it might not be in the exact town the college is located in.

3. **Distance from home**
   - You might be looking at this map and realize that none of these colleges are close to your hometown – that’s ok! College is a time to explore and push your boundaries.
   - If you’re interested in going far from home, it’s a good idea to start talking with your family about that now, so everyone is on board with you.
4. **Geography as well as seasonal climate**
   - As we mentioned before, think about what’s around the college. Do you want to be near mountains? Near the water? Near forests? Near a city?
   - Climate can be important as well. If you’ve never had the chance to try out real seasons, now’s your chance! Or if you want to escape the snow to a sunnier climate, you can try that!
Another factor you can look at is the academic programs offered by different schools.

1. **Specific programs of interest**
   - If you are already very interested in pursuing a specific degree, you should make sure it is available at the schools you are applying to!
   - Also, remember that if you’re interested in a career in business or law or medicine, you don’t have to major in those fields. You can if you want, but many people study something different than the professional field they pursue.

2. **Options if you are undecided or change your mind**
   - About 80% of college students in the United States change their major at least once. That’s a lot! Make sure there are options you might be interested in if you decide to change your major.

3. **Opportunities for research or other involvement**
   - If you’re interested in research, find out if it’s easy to get involved in as an undergraduate.
   - You should also think about how easy it is to study abroad, hold an internship for academic credit, or participate in other academic opportunities.

4. **Core requirements and flexibility**
   - Some schools require all students to take some classes in certain “core” areas, others have certain classes that all students must take, still others offer extreme
flexibility in selecting courses and even designing your own major.
• It’s up to you to decide what kind of college experience you’re looking for, and which style best fits your interests.
Finally, you shouldn’t forget to think about what student life is like on campus! Here are some things you can look at:

1. **Variety of campus and student-run organizations**
   - If there are activities or extracurriculars you really want to get involved in, check now to make sure they’re available!
   - You can also look at the activities or programming run by residential housing, such as Greek life, if you want that to be a big part of your experience.
   - You should also look for different resources and support that are available, including multicultural, first-gen, and socioeconomic diversity groups or campus offices.

2. **Athletics**
   - Are you excited about playing fun games of flag football on a team of your friends? Or maybe ultimate Frisbee is your thing. No matter the case, most schools have a variety of intramural sports that you can join for low or no cost. If you’re really excited about going to a big stadium and cheering on your college football team, then look for colleges that have larger and more competitive sports teams.

3. **Housing system and options**
   - Colleges have different housing systems. Some might have small residences that are based on interest, others might be divided by class year.
• At some schools, all students might live on campus, while at others upperclassmen might move off-campus into apartments or other housing options.

1. **Student and campus culture**
   • You should also try to get a feel for what the overall campus culture is like. What are students excited about? What unites them?
   • You can also look at things such as what students do on weekends – do they explore nearby areas or stay on campus and hang out?
RESEARCH METHODS

1. Start a spreadsheet now.

   - Researching all these different factors can take quite a bit of time – that’s why it’s important to stay organized.
   - We recommend starting a research spreadsheet right away. This should include basic information about the college as well as the factors that are most important to you.

2. Go beyond the college website

   - When you’re filling out your spreadsheet, go beyond the college website. Look into student-run blogs, read student-run newspapers, look at the college’s YouTube channel, see if there’s a way to connect with a current student who can tell you more about their experience.

3. Attend events hosted by the admissions office (online or in person)

   - If there are any events hosted by the admissions office, try to attend them. For example, the college might be represented at a local college fair, which is a great opportunity to talk more with an admissions officer. Or perhaps the school is hosting a webinar or online event for prospective students – those are all great opportunities to learn more about the school.
4. **If possible, visit colleges in person**
   
   - If you want to apply to schools far away and aren’t able to visit them, then still visit schools near you. Visiting **any** college campus will give you a better idea of what’s important to you in a college campus and setting.
Discussion: What are your goals in completing the college application?
- To prove that you can succeed academically
- To show that you can add to the college community
- To help the admissions office appreciate your progress
- Ultimately, to get admitted!

In this workshop we will talk about how college applications are evaluated, so you can know how to put together a compelling application.
What do admissions officers look for when evaluating an application for admission?

- **Evidence of academic success, achievement, and intellectual curiosity**
  - Top schools are looking for students who are an academic fit for their school. But beyond that, they want to see that you’re intellectually curious, not that you simply have high test scores.

- **Potential to make a meaningful contribution to campus life**
  - Admissions officers are selecting students to form a well-rounded class. They are selecting students who will make a positive addition to the campus – someone who will be engaged with their school.

- **Diversity of experience and background**
  - Remember, QuestBridge college partners are actively seeking out low-income students!

- **Desire to attend their specific school**
  - This doesn’t need to be expressed in the QuestBridge essay; many schools ask for a supplemental essay that asks why you specifically want to attend that school. Make sure to spend time on this and make sure it’s unique to each school you are applying to.
In addition to those overarching themes the admissions officers are looking for, they are also evaluating your application to find these four pieces of information.

The next several slides will take us through specific parts of the application where they are looking for these four factors, and what, in particular, they like to see.
# 1. ACADEMIC ABILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>What We’re Looking For</th>
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<td>Academics/Transcript</td>
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<td>• Explanation of circumstances that may have affected academics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standardized Test Scores</td>
<td>• Competitive standardized scores</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Meet college requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honors and Awards</td>
<td>• School or non-school awards</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Include being a College Prep Scholar!</td>
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## Academic ability

1. **Academic/Transcript**
   - Most rigorous curriculum available...
     - You should be continuing to challenge yourself with your 12\textsuperscript{th} grade course selections
     - Looking at courses from 9-12\textsuperscript{th} grades
     - Rigor of courses
     - Taking advantage of opportunities available to student
     - ...and a positive trend in grades
       - Trends in grades
       - Relationship between grades and course selection
       - When and if your school recalculates GPA
       - When a class rank is helpful
   - Explanation of circumstances that may have affected academics
     - Housing or familial issues that affect attendance or academic performance
     - Attending rigorous school on scholarship
     - Limited access to online and/or college courses
     - Lack of test prep resources

2. **Testing**
   - Competitive standardized scores & meeting requirements
     - Meeting testing requirements by the appropriate dates
• Reporting all scores vs. Score Choice
• Note any factors affecting your test scores.

1. **Honors and Awards**
   • School or non-school awards
   • Include both! (Give examples.)
   • For example: you were selected as a College Prep Scholar!
Interests

1. **Activities/Work**
   - Clear passion for your activities
   - Importance of participating in extracurriculars
   - Participation in many activities vs. passion for a few
   - Interests outside of classroom
   - Leadership and increased involvement over time
     - Looking for following qualities: commitment, motivation
     - How student will contribute to your campus community
   - Tips for listing extracurricular activities
     - Spelling out acronyms
     - Providing descriptions
   - Work experience (including family responsibilities)
     - What student is doing with spare time?
     - This might explain why you can’t take on as many extracurricular activities, etc.
     - Don’t be afraid to talk family responsibilities. If it’s something you have to spend time on, include it!
     - For example:
       - Need to care for family or siblings after school
• Work earnings to pay for household bills

1. **Academic and career interests**
   • How your future interests relate to your activities in high school
     • They don’t have to! But if they do, make sure to draw that connection in your application
   • Strong passion, no matter the topic
     • Remember – looking for people who are intellectually curious

2. **Interest in the college**
   • Interviews often offered on availability of alumni near you
     • If you’re offered an interview, take it! This is a chance to learn more about the college and show how interested you are in attending
     • Other ways to show interest: attend any available webinar to learn more about the school, email the admissions office with any questions, if the college will be at a local college fair make sure to meet the representative and email them after, talk with current students to learn more about the college, etc.
3. YOUR STORY

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<td>• Explanations for anything that might be unclear about your application</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sections</td>
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Your story

1. **Essays**
   - Authentic voice and story
     - Types of essays that stand out
     - Traditional vs. non-traditional essays (poems, song lyrics, etc.)
     - Importance of writing in own voice
     - Making sure your authentic voice comes through
   - Mature, college-level writing
     - Importance of mature writing for college-level coursework
     - Places to go for help editing essay – teachers, counselor, parents

2. **Short answers**
   - More insight to you and how you think

3. **Additional information sections**
   - Explanations for anything that might be unclear about your application
     - If you don’t tell us, we won’t know!
     - We can’t make broad assumptions when reading your application
4. OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE

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<td>• Requirement of 2 teacher recommendations from core subjects</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How you would contribute to the classroom experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor Report</td>
<td>• A better understanding of your school environment and opportunities</td>
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</table>

Outside perspective

1. **Recommendations**
   - Insight from teachers in core academic subjects
   - Requirement of 2 teacher recommendations from core subjects
   - How to select teachers to write recommendations
   - More context to your achievements
     - Character support
     - Academic ability
     - Details about background or classroom involvement
     - Tangible examples of excellent work and potential
   - What to offer to recommenders to help paint stronger picture for recommendation
     - Resume
     - Transcript
     - Personal statement
     - Areas of academic and extracurricular interest
     - Information about colleges student is applying to
     - List of deadlines
2. **Counselor report (also known as the Secondary School Report)**
   - A better understanding of your school environment and opportunities
     - Requirement of 1 counselor recommendation
     - Details about academic curriculum, courses, or teachers not offered in other sections of application (i.e. AP Calculus offered every other year, etc.)
     - Comparison against your whole class
     - Putting student in context with rest of class
   - Advice for students with counselors who don’t know student personally

* Thoughts on additional recommendations? (from organizations that you are involved with or from people who guide your research, etc)
QUESTIONS?