You're going to understand most of the information that you find on a school profile page. But as you go through a school profile, make sure that you're adding the important information that you find onto your school list. Remember, not everything needs to make it onto your school list. Just the information that's important to you. Now, we can't go through every piece of the school profile. But I want to go over some of the information that students often find confusing. If you find information that you don't understand, do not ignore it. Take the time to understand what that information is, because it might end up being really important to you. Hopefully, you'll see a couple of examples of that now. Again, you can split this information up between what you want versus what is realistic. The first thing we want to talk about is academic calendar. The most common calendar types that you're going to see on a school profile page are semester and quarter. In a semester system, there are two academic terms per year: the fall and the spring. Each academic term lasts 15 weeks. In the quarter system, there are three academic terms per year: fall, winter, and spring. And each one of those terms lasts for ten weeks. So in both systems, you're studying for 30 weeks per year, but they're actually very different types of studying. The shorter duration of the quarter system means that your classes move quickly, and that over the years, you're going to have the opportunity to take many, many more classes. The longer duration of semester system classes means that your classes potentially offer greater depth or more time to explore a certain area. Does it matter? Absolutely. During your self-assessment, hopefully you've thought about how you like to learn. Are you happier taking your time and exploring? Or do you like to move quickly from topic to topic to topic? You might find that you're much better suited for one calendar type over another. Another piece of information that you're going to find is something called retention rate. And in my opinion, this is one of the most important pieces of information that you can have about a school. Retention rate shows the percentage of first year students who return to a university for their second year of study. From my point of view, this is a great way to measure how students like the school and how successful they are. Sometimes a student will leave the school for a good reason, but most of the time when a student leaves a school, it's for a bad reason. Maybe their grades aren't good. Maybe they don't like it. Maybe they can't afford it any longer, right? This is not always the school's fault, but schools with a high retention rate clearly do a great job in supporting their students to keep them coming back. Now, there's a lot of different research, but the data shows that the national average for retention rate is about 75%. So on average, 75% of first year students will return for their second year. When you're looking at a school with a high retention rate, you can be comfortable that the school is doing a good job supporting their students and bringing them back. If you see a school that you're interested in with a lower retention rate, it doesn't mean you should eliminate that school, but you might want to ask the school why are those students leaving. What's the reason for their departure? You probably don't have retention rate on your school list right now. But now that you know what it is, you might want to think about adding it. Another rate that you'll see is graduation rate. Now, a U.S. university education is supposed to last for four years, right? Well, believe it or not, less than half of all students at U.S. universities will graduate in four years. Graduation rates can be important for two big reasons. First, the basic purpose of going to a college or university is to get a degree. How many students are achieving that goal? Second is cost related. If it takes you five or six years to graduate from school, the cost of your education is going to be significantly higher. If cost is a big consideration for you, graduation rates
should be something that you're definitely looking into. Again, if you're looking into schools with lower graduation rates or longer times to graduate, you might want to ask the school, why? What is it that their students are doing that's taking five years or six years to graduate? You might find that it is for good reasons. And remember, if this information is important to you, be sure to write it down on your school list. A little bit different, you'll also find information about diversity. Search sites will offer information about the diversity of students studying at a university. Now, diversity can refer to a lot of things. But two main components of diversity are the race or ethnicity of students, and where geographically those students come from. Do you want to know who's going to be sitting around you in your classes? Well, take a look at the diversity information to see who your classmates are and where they're coming from. This includes how many other international students are at that university. Now, these sites have information about academics, campus, unique features, and much, much more. Take the time to look through all of this information and continue to add important information about what you want to your school list. The information that you find can talk about what you want, but it can also help you evaluate what is realistic. Another reminder to add what is realistic to your school list. You're going to see the basic information about how many students in total are applying to that school or how many students applied to that school last year. You're also going to see how many of those students were accepted or admitted. Admitted is just another word that means accepted. A word that some students are not familiar with is enrolled. Enrolled is the number of students who were accepted who chose to actually attend that university. You'll find all three sets of those numbers on school profile pages. You're also going to find what is known as acceptance rate. The acceptance rate refers back to that idea of selectivity. And it is very literally the percentage of the, of the applicants who were accepted. The number of accepted students divided by the number of total applicants. Acceptance rate is a great dose of reality that tells you how hard it is to get into a certain university. The lower the acceptance rate, the more difficult it is to gain admission. You can also use acceptance rate to compare schools that have different amounts of applicants. For example, the University of Pennsylvania receives over 30,000 applications for admission each year. Claremont McKenna College in California receives just over 5,000 applications. Both schools have about a 13% acceptance rate. So they are both very, very hard to get into even though they receive significantly different numbers of applications. Something that you'll want to note is that acceptance rates for public universities can sometimes be skewed by in-state admission. A public university has an obligation to accept students from within their own state. So when you see a, an acceptance rate for a public university, especially if it's a higher acceptance rate, you have to understand that that might not be your acceptance rate as an international student. Don't be deceived by that number for public universities. As you continue to go through a university profile, you'll find information about grades required for acceptance. On some sites, you're going to see GPA graphs, and on other sites, you'll find average GPA information. How does your GPA compare? Knowing the acceptance rate and the GPA requirements will help you figure out how realistic it is for you to be accepted at that university. Similar to GPA, you're going to find information about test scores. This information is commonly listed as the mid-range test score, which is also known as the middle 50% of test scores. Since this is the middle 50%, that means that 25% of the scores are above and 25% of the scores are below. More specifically, we know that each section of the SAT has a maximum score of 800 and the ACT has a maximum score of 36. When you look at this information, you can see which scores are in the middle 50%, and you also know which scores are in the top 25% because you know the
maximum. What you don't know is how low a university will go in the bottom 25%. Now, you might also see test scores listed as an average. And regardless of how the test scores are listed, you have to ask yourself, how realistic is your admission based on your test scores. Do your scores fall in that middle 50%? Maybe in that top 25%? If you see an average, are they above the average or below? The same goes for TOEFL and IELTS scores. Now, these scores are usually listed a little bit different. They're usually listed as either a minimum score or an average score. The average score is much more helpful than the minimum, because an average score is showing you what you need to achieve, the score you need to achieve to actually be accepted. You're going to find that sometimes the minimum score is significantly lower than the average score. So to have a realistic chance for admission, you want to score closer to the average than to the minimum. Now, what we've reviewed here is a very small sample of the information that you'll find on a school profile. You're going to find a lot more information when you do your research. Some of this information might be important to you and some might not. But again, it's up to you to decide which information is important and which information is not important. For information that you decide is important, remember to keep track of it on your school list.