

What's Next?

A PACED Decision Making Model for Post-High School Plans

FOCUS:

Overview:

In this activity, students learn about the PACED decision making model. They learn about taking a rational approach to their most important life decisions. They recognize that the best choice is a matter of the criteria that are most important to them. They critically think about and research the alternatives and the criteria. Their assigned goal is go through the PACED steps - 1) Define the Problem, 2) List Alternatives, 3) Determine Criteria, 4) Evaluate Alternatives, and 5) Make a Decision.

Objectives:

- Think critically about post-high school options
- Decide on criteria most important when choosing a college
- Identify alternatives (i.e., college choices) and evaluate each alternative based on personalized criteria (i.e., conduct research)
- Make decisions about colleges that are the best fit with the criteria

Background Information:

High school students are required to make some of the most important decisions of their lives. Their decisions about education (i.e., whether or not to go to college, what college to attend, what major to choose) will have long-term implications for their financial and emotional well-being. Yet, many of these students may not have fully developed the critical thinking tools necessary to make these decision despite their importance. This can lead to sub-optimal decisions for some students. The goal of this activity is to help student learn how to approach important decisions such as these, using the specific context of choosing a college.

Curriculum Multi-tasking:

- Group interaction and discussion
- Critical thinking
- Research

Grade Level: Juniors and Seniors

Time Frame: 1 class period to administer lesson (though students should continue with the project by talking to their families and further thinking about their choices)

PREPARE:

Materials:

1. One laptop per student (for the individual research approach) OR One laptop per group of 4-5 students (for the group-based research approach)
2. List of Arkansas Colleges and Universities
3. Possible criteria and web site list
4. PACED Decision Making Model Worksheets (blank and example)

Construct:

1. Print each handout in the back of the curriculum for each student
2. Set up the classroom for the activity (i.e., computer setup for individuals or groups, make it easy for them to get in groups of 4-5 to discuss things when needed)

TEACH:

Introduction:

Explain the following to the students: You've probably heard it a million times already - when you graduate from high school, you will have many decisions to make. And this is true. In fact the variety of decisions ahead of you may seem daunting and you may wonder how to make these decisions. Or you may have already made up your mind, you will be off to this college for that degree. Either way, it doesn't hurt to think about these critical life decisions in a bit more detail since they will have implications for the rest of your life.

To work through this issue, we'll use something call the PACED decision making model. This model can help with just about any decision ahead of you, so working through it is beneficial for the many decisions you have ahead. When you feel overwhelmed by a decision, you can just think back to this exercise. Here are the steps to the PACED model:

- Define the **P**roblem
- List **A**lternatives
- Determine **C**riteria
- Evaluate the Alternatives
- Make a **D**ecision

Let me explain the first step now, then we'll talk through the next steps as we complete the exercise. The first step sets you on track for the entire decision making process - it is to **Define the Problem**. We all have decisions to make every day - from what to wear to what to eat to where to live. Some of these decisions are minor, but some are major. For the major decisions, it is important to think rationally to make the best decision for your future. Once you define the problem, you have started the decision making process.

Ask the students to tell you some of the problems that they might be facing as they approach graduation. They are likely to suggest some of the following:

- 1) What next (i.e., go to work, take a gap year, go to community or university)?,
- 2) What college to attend, and
- 3) What major to choose? (i.e., what do you want to be when you grow up?).

If they do not, try to direct their thinking toward these issues. Then explain, that today the class is going to use the PACED model to consider the decision of choosing a college.

So the problem is: Where should I go to college? Hand out the PACED blank worksheet and ask them to fill in the question.

Activities:

1. Divide students into groups of 4 or 5.
2. **Explain:** Let's begin by letting your talk a bit as a group about your college plans. What colleges are you considering? Why? What is most important to you in a college? What do you think are the best factors to consider in selecting a college? What have your parents, mentors and family told you to consider? Share your thoughts regarding these questions with your group. As a group, develop a list of criteria you think might be important to making decisions about college. Give students time to discuss and develop a list.
3. **Explain:** Now that we have thought about these issues a little, let's get started on the decision making process. We know our question – "Where should I go to college?" The next step is to list alternatives. **List Alternatives.** Alternatives are options that could provide the solution to your problem. So your problem is "Where should I go to college?" and your alternatives are a list of colleges you might choose. Thus, this step involves thinking about the primary options you are choosing from. (Hand out the list of Arkansas Colleges and University as a starting place for them.) Explain that it is probably impossible to consider every single option, but you have to start somewhere. So they should think about the schools that they think are their top choices. For example, if they know they want to go to a public school in Arkansas, they should start with that part of the list, then narrow down from there to 5.
4. Have them write down the 5 alternatives that they are most interested in. Tell them that while the list is focused on Arkansas schools, they can put other schools on the list if they are serious alternatives being considered (e.g. Harvard). Allow them to

- talk to people in their group about the 5 alternatives they have started with while everyone works on their list.
5. **Explain:** The next step is to decide which of the 5 alternatives you have listed is the best option for you. To do this, we need to start by **Determining the Criteria**. Criteria are the things that are important to you in a college. For example, you may have limited funding, so affordability is most important to you or you may have a specific major already picked out, so degree program is important to you. The number of criteria is somewhat limitless, but you have to narrow down to the most important because you can only evaluate so many things at one time. (Hand out the possible criteria). Tell them to think about the criteria that are most important to them. Explain that criteria are likely to be different for every student, and that there is not a right answer as it depends on their plans and circumstances.
 6. Have them write down the 6 criteria that are most important to them. Tell them that they may have other criteria than those listed. Explain that they do not need to be constrained by the list; the list just provides some common criteria that are likely to be important in many cases. Allow them to talk to people in their group about their choice of criteria while everyone works on their list. Give them the opportunity to ask questions about the criteria (e.g., what does a graduation rate tell me?). Hand out and refer them to the completed PACED worksheet to see an example.
 7. **Explain:** Once all the students have finished their criteria, explain that criteria are not all the same in importance. For example, if you need to be close to home to care for your family, distance from home may be your top criterion while another on your list may be less important. Because of this, the students need to weight the criteria according to their importance. Refer them to the completed PACED worksheet to see an example.
 8. Have the students weight each criteria on a scale of 1 - 10 with 10 being extremely important and 1 being not very important. Multiple criteria can have the same weight if they are equally important. Allow them to talk to people in their group about their weights while everyone works on their list.
 9. **Explain:** The next step is to **Evaluate the Alternatives** based on the criteria. To do this, requires research - that is, they need to search for information on whether each of the alternatives meets their criteria. For each alternative, they will investigate whether it meet the criteria (yes/no for each criterion). Refer them to the completed PACED worksheet to see an example. The easiest way to start doing this is to look on the internet for information.
 10. Have each student or group research the alternatives they have listed using the websites listed on the Possible College Criteria page. If they are working in groups, have them research the alternatives starting with the ones that the most students had on their list. However, note that even a criteria that sounds the same may be met for some students but not for others (e.g., major offered may mean engineering for some students and business for others). If they are working individually, they can start with the first alternative and move down the list. Allow them to do this until they are finished OR until you have only 20 minutes left for the class.
 11. **Explain:** Now, we can use this information to evaluate the alternatives. For each alternative give it a score based on whether it has the criteria and the weightings associated with the criteria. So if you answered yes to a criterion, and the criterion

- was weighted at 10 points, that contributes 10 points to the alternative's score. Refer them to the completed PACED worksheet to see an example.
12. Have them add up the total points for each alternative and enter it in the last column on the worksheet (on the far right).
 13. **Explain:** Now, you can finally **Make a Decision!** To do this, look at the scores. The highest scoring school is the best choice based on your criteria. If there is a tie between two school, you will need to think about additional criteria. It is important to recognize, however, that every choice comes with an opportunity cost (i.e., the next best option). You miss out on one school by choosing another. Refer them to the completed PACED worksheet to see an example.
 14. Have them write down their decision and their opportunity cost. Allow them to discuss their decision and opportunity cost with their group.
 15. About 5-10 minutes before the end of class, stop groups from talking so that everyone can participate in the debriefing session.
 16. Ask and discuss the following questions.

Debriefing Questions & Understandings:

1. **What have you learned from this about the decisions you have ahead of you?** While there is no right answer to this question, some things that might come up are the importance of thinking critically about these issues and ways of determining and ranking criteria.
2. **What steps in the decision making process do you have ahead of you?** They are likely to mention additional research, talking to their parents or other mentors, or thinking more about the alternatives, criteria, etc. Explain that the intent of the lesson was not to make a final decision, but to get them thinking about it critically so they can make the best decision for their future.
3. **What additional information would have been helpful to complete this exercise?** They may suggest information on scholarship programs, etc. Refer them to the websites noted below or the school counselor (if this is something they help with) for additional help.
4. **What other decisions might you use the PACED tool for?** Some examples - choosing where to live (i.e., rent a house, apartment, dorm), purchasing a car, or deciding on an extracurricular activity.
5. **How could the decision making tool be improved?** While Yes/No makes evaluation easier, scoring on each criteria then multiplying by the weight would be more detailed and allow for finer grained analysis. Some students might want to consider more or fewer criteria.

Closure:

Explain that this approach helps students learn to make rational decisions. Note that the limited class time prevents a final decision in class, but they should continue working on their PACED model to get to the best decision. Encourage students to continue to find examples of other decisions that might benefit from this approach in the coming weeks.

Evaluation:

Performance Task:

1. Each student should complete a preliminary PACED decision making model worksheet.
2. Students should write up their next steps to make a final decision and pursue their choice.

CONNECT:

Web:

- <http://saygocollege.com/>
- <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>
- <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/college-score-card>
- <http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/index.php?lid=463&type=educator>
- <http://www.inarkansas.com/publications/arkansas-next>

Extension:

Consider making the exercise longer than one class period. One way to do this is to have each student make a poster for a college that includes important information like cost, location, etc. Then have the students bring the posters in and put them up on the classroom walls. When you get to steps 3 and 4 (Listing Alternatives) and 9, 10, and 11 (Evaluating Alternatives based on Criteria), you can encourage the students to walk around and look at the posters. This makes the project more interactive. It also allows them to start thinking about the exercise before developing their decision making model, which could potentially increase conversations at home and with friends about college. When the students reach steps 13, 14, and 15 (Making a Decision), you can have the students move around and stand by the poster for the school they selected, then explain how they arrived at this decision.

ARKANSAS COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:

4 Year Public Universities	4 Year Independent Universities	2 Year Public Universities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arkansas State University • Arkansas Tech University • Henderson State University • Southern Arkansas University • University of Arkansas at Fort Smith • University of Arkansas at Little Rock • University of Arkansas at Monticello • University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff • University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences • University of Arkansas, Fayetteville • University of Central Arkansas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arkansas Baptist College • Central Baptist College • Crowley’s Ridge College • Harding University • Hendrix College • John Brown University • Lyon College • Ouachita Baptist University • Philander Smith College • University of the Ozarks • Williams Baptist College 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arkansas Northeastern College • Arkansas State University – Beebe • Arkansas State University – Mountain Home • Arkansas State University – Newport • Black River Technical College • Cossatot Community College of the University of Arkansas • College of the Ouachitas • East Arkansas Community College • Mid-South Community College • National Park Community College • North Arkansas College • Northwest Arkansas Community College • Ozarka College • Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas • Pulaski Technical College • Rich Mountain Community College • South Arkansas Community College • Southeast Arkansas College • Southern Arkansas University – Tech • University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville • University of Arkansas Community College at Hope • University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton

List from: <http://saygocollege.com/arkansas-colleges/>

POSSIBLE COLLEGE CRITERIA:

- **Majors offered & Accreditation**
- **Location (e.g., close to home, urban or suburban)**
- **Affordability (a combination of costs and aid)**
- **Size**
- **Faculty to Student Ratio**
- **Campus Activities (e.g., theater, symphony, Greek Life)**
- **Prestige**
- **Graduation Rate**
- **Admission Standards**
- **Athletics**
- **Graduate School Opportunities**
- **Career Center Success**

To research each criteria, go to:

- <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org> (look up the alternatives you are considering. Much of the criteria are compiled on this Website.)
- <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/college-score-card>
- <http://saygocollege.com/>

Research Resources on Arkansas Higher Education

Arkansas Next: A Guide to Life After College website: Fabulous site for every Arkansas high school students. Learn about job opportunities, career paths, degrees, Arkansas colleges, scholarships and life after high school. Valuable tool for every student. An educational service every teacher should provide. We can make a difference! <http://www.inarkansas.com/publications/arkansas-next>

Digital Edition of Arkansas Next: A Guide to Live After High School – excellent resource for ANYONE planning for higher education. Information on scholarships, institutions of higher education, salaries of different professions and so much more! <http://www.pageturnpro.com/Arkansas-Business-Group/43664-Arkansas-Next-2013/index.html#1> –

Arkansas Next Blog: A good resource for routinely getting updates with valuable information to prepare you for the world after high school. <http://www.inarkansas.com/publications/arkansas-next/blog>

Arkansas Jobs & Salaries: Find Out What Your Dream Job Pays: A listing of jobs or careers in Arkansas and the salary you could expect. <http://www.inarkansas.com/86779/arkansas-jobs-salaries-find-out-what-your-dream-job-pays>

What's Your Next Level? 7 Ways to Get a Higher Education: College is not for everyone. But better educated Arkansans benefit the individual as well as society as a whole. This article introduces seven paths to more education and therefore higher earnings. <http://www.inarkansas.com/86729/whats-your-next-level-7-ways-to-get-a-higher-education>

What's Higher Education Really Worth? This article shows your students the average salary associated with each level of education. It could be eye opening! <http://www.inarkansas.com/86738/whats-higher-education-really-worth>

Arkansas College Listings: Use this site to learn about the options for higher education in the state of Arkansas. Includes tuition, admission requirements, and financial aid information. http://www.inarkansas.com/listings?listing_type=colleges

ADHE's YOUNiversal Application: Apply for 20 Scholarships with Just 1 Form: What an efficient way to get financial aid! <http://www.inarkansas.com/86720/adhes-youuniversal-application-apply-for-20-scholarships-with-just-1-form>

How to Go to College for Free in 4 Easy Steps: Get the scoop on how to apply for scholarships. Don't dilly dally on this one! <http://www.inarkansas.com/86704/how-to-go-to-college-for-free-in-4-easy-steps>

The Dos & DON'Ts of Social Media: College admissions offices may check social media to learn about you. What do you want them to see? <http://www.inarkansas.com/86716/the-dos-donts-of-social-media>

Why Student Loans Should Be Your Last Resort: Article explaining ways to pay for college as well as the need to minimize the amount of money you borrow. <http://www.inarkansas.com/86710/why-student-loans-should-be-your-last-resort>

5 Nontraditional Ways to Pay for College: Here are some ideas to consider to help defray the cost of college. <http://www.inarkansas.com/86708/5-nontraditional-ways-to-pay-for-college>

6 Cool Majors: Awesome Degrees offered in Arkansas: This resource might catch the eye of students who are less academically inclined. <http://www.inarkansas.com/86711/6-cool-majors-awesome-degrees-offered-in-arkansas>

4 Tips to make Your Resume Stand Out: Want to get the attention of the applications team, consider these pointers. <http://www.inarkansas.com/86727/4-tips-to-make-your-resume-stand-out>

Top 10 Smartphone Apps for High School, College: Put your phone to work for you. Use these apps to study for the ACT; qualify for financial aid; develop a budget; create flashcards and so much more. <http://www.inarkansas.com/86725/top-10-smartphone-apps-for-high-school-college>

Study Abroad: Where Will Your Education Take You? Learn about educational travel opportunities and how to pay for them.

<http://www.inarkansas.com/86719/study-abroad-where-will-your-education-take-you>

Ten students you'll meet at college. A humorous look at different types of students.

<http://www.inarkansas.com/86707/10-students-youll-meet-at-college-and-what-you-can-learn-from-them>

PACED DECISION MAKING MODEL WORKSHEET:

Define the Problem:							
Determine the Criteria: 	Criteria 1:	Criteria 2:	Criteria 3:	Criteria 4:	Criteria 5:	Criteria 6:	Evaluate Alternatives:
List Alternatives: 	Value of Criteria 1:	Value of Criteria 2:	Value of Criteria 3:	Value of Criteria 4:	Value of Criteria 5:	Value of Criteria 6:	
Alternative 1:							
Alternative 2:							
Alternative 3:							
Alternative 4:							
Alternative 5:							
Make a Decision:					Note Opportunity Costs:		

PACED DECISION MAKING MODEL EXAMPLE:

Define the Problem : Where should I go to college?							
Determine the Criteria :	Criteria 1: Program of Study	Criteria 2: Extracurricular Activities	Criteria 3: Student to Faculty Ratio	Criteria 4: Affordable	Criteria 5: Close to Home	Criteria 6: Graduation Rate >50%	Evaluate Alternatives :
List Alternatives :	Value of Criteria 1:	Value of Criteria 2:	Value of Criteria 3:	Value of Criteria 4:	Value of Criteria 5:	Value of Criteria 6:	
Alternative 1: University of Arkansas	10	4	5	8	2	5	34
Alternative 2: Arkansas State University	Yes	Yes	Yes (19:1)	Yes	No	No (39%)	27
Alternative 3: Hendrix College	No	Yes	Yes (11:1)	No	No	Yes (72%)	14
Alternative 4: Harding University	Yes	Yes	Yes (17:1)	No	No	Yes (61%)	24
Alternative 5: Southern Arkansas University	No	Yes	Yes (16:1)	Yes	No	No (35%)	17
Make a Decision: University of Arkansas					Note Opportunity Cost: Arkansas State University		