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Student Bulletin

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High School Edition

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Final Decision: College Choice

You've already narrowed your college choices. Here are some tips to help you make a final decision.

Obvious and Not-So-Obvious Questions

College Cost: Obvious....

What different financial aid packages does the school offer? Remember to factor in costs such as tranportation home, long distance calls, etc.

How much does housing cost? Is finding off-campus housing difficult?

And not so obvious...

What is my actual cost? Other expenses beyond just the "sticker price" for tuition can include:

- Lab fees
- Fee to add/drop a course
- Transportation home
- Computer/Internet fees
- Car expenses (gas, parking, insurance, etc.)
- Application and doc fees
- Security deposit

What is the average increase in tuition and other costs from year to year? View at least three years' worth of data to chart past increases.

Academics/Career Help: Obvious...

Does your college offer the program you want? Do required courses fill up quickly? How many students graduate in four years? What's the reputation of the program you desire?

What is the quality of academic resources? Are the library, equipment, computer labs, etc. up-to-date? Accessible?

What kind of career planning services are available? How many graduates find jobs in their field of study? Does the school offer your preferred level of career development skills?

And not so obvious...

How easy is it to switch majors? Will it mean spending more time in school? What other majors are available?

What percentage of students graduate in four years? Ask for an explanation if the the on-time graduation rate is low. Is it difficult to get into required classes?

Campus Life: Obvious...

What student organizations are on campus? Are they ones you would want to join?

What meal options are available? What is served in the cafeteria? Does it cater to specific allergies? What's available when the cafeteria is closed?

And not so obvious...

What is the retention rate? How many students come back after their freshman year?

Do you need a car? What jobs are close to campus? Would you need to drive to any classes?

Take a Tour of Your Favorite College...

On campus...

- Schedule an appointment. Be ready with multiple dates and times. Avoid major events or holidays. Arrange to speak to other students, professors, financial aid, admissions and career offices. Ask about a guided tour.

- Pack smart. You may want to pack more casual clothes for when you walk around campus, and something more formal for an interview with the admissions office.

- Take notes as you visit. If you visit several colleges (especially in one day), the details can get blurry.

- Go to a class. Note class size, instructors, difficulty level.

- View other campus buildings. Check out residence hall rooms, cafeterias, computer labs, health and recreational facilities, the library, etc.

...Or off campus

- Research online. Check out the college's website. Is there a virtual tour that you can take online?

- Communicate with the college directly. Call or e-mail the admissions and financial aid offices. Some colleges offer chatrooms. Write down the name of the person with whom you spoke.

- College fairs. Let colleges come to you. Ask your counselor about upcoming fairs and prepare some questions to ask the college's representative.

- Use your personal network. Talk to counselors, family members, siblings and friends to find someone who attended your prospective college. Ask about their experiences and impressions.

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FastTip! Safety on Campus:

Is your prospective college safe? Ask if your school has emergency call boxes, campus escorts, shuttle services and ID checks. Is the campus well-lit at night? Does campus housing prevent intruders?