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Session 3: The College Search

The purpose of this session is to familiarize students with the variety of college options open to them and ways in which to access college information. The emphasis should be on opportunity and access, not on the criteria for admission, which will come in a later session. Using Session I as a starting point, students will embark on a college search using counselor expertise, web resources (if available), and viewbooks/catalogues/guidebooks.

Objectives

By the end of this session, students will:

- know how to prioritize their criteria for finding appropriate schools
- understand the importance of finding a good fit
- find relevant information about colleges
- learn how to make the most of a campus visit as a research tool

*Activities/Handouts***Activity #1: Finding the Right Fit**

Handouts: Résumé from Session 1, Criteria Chart

Activity #2: Researching Colleges

Handouts: Criteria Chart from Activity #1, Websites Focused on College Exploration

Activity #3: Making the Most of a Campus Visit

Handouts: Campus Visits, College Visit Checklist, College Comparison, Campus Visit Checklist, and College Comparison Worksheet

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Activity 1: Finding the Right Fit

Opening Discussion

This session focuses on how to search for the right “fit” in a college. Based on the initial session’s discussion of types of colleges, ask students what kinds of institutions they think they might want to consider. What majors might they want to pursue?

Activity/Handouts

Résumé from Session 1

Criteria

Instructions

1. Ask students to review their personal résumés from Session 1, looking especially at Sections 4 and 5.
2. Direct students to fill in the criteria column of the chart, keeping in mind the things most important to them when considering a college. Students can use the words listed below the chart or look at their résumés for ideas. If they know of particular colleges, they can add them and fill in the blanks if they are able. They will be using this chart for the next exercise.

Criteria

Primary Selection Criteria	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4	College 5
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
Other Criteria					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					

Location

Distance from Home/
Travel
School Setting (Urban,
Rural)
Location and Size of
Nearest City

Size

Enrollment
Physical Size of
Campus

Environment

Co-ed, Male, Female
Diversity

Admission Profile

Average Test Scores,
GPA, Class Rank

Academics

Your Major Offered
Special Requirements
Accreditation
Student-Faculty Ratio
Typical Class Size

College Expenses

Tuition / Fees
Room and Board
Cost of Attendance
Percent Received Aid
Scholarships
Federal Work Study

Housing

Residence Hall
Types and Sizes
Food Plan
Fees
On / Off Campus

Facilities

Academic
Recreational
Other

Job Placement Services

Career Center

Activities

Clubs/Organizations
Greek Life
Athletics
Intramurals
Other

Opinion of Person Who Has Attended this School Recently

Their opinion

Type of School

Public university
Private college
Military Academy
Community College
Trade School
For-profit

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Activity #2: Researching Colleges

Opening Discussion

Students need to examine a variety of sources so they can begin to see the similarities and differences among colleges and universities. They shouldn't think about cost at this point, but rather, qualities, and characteristics colleges have to offer.

Handouts

Websites Focused on College Exploration

Criteria Checklist from Activity #1

Viewbooks, catalogues, and guidebooks

Instructions

1. If there is internet access, show the students several websites (see handout) and guide them through a representative number, pointing out information about majors, residential options, the admission/application site (which will be covered in a later session), and other aspects as you see fit.
2. Viewbooks and guidebooks should be on hand, too. Ask students to read a description of a college from a guidebook and talk about what they think they would like or not like about that school.
3. Have students look at resources independently and fill in their "Criteria Checklist" of five schools.
4. Once they have developed a list, they should return to the resource books or go to the college websites to learn more about whether "the fit" is right for them.

Websites Focused on College Exploration

College Information

Center for Student Opportunity: www.imfirst.org
Coalition Application:
www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org
College Navigator: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>
College Board: www.collegeboard.org
Colleges That Change Lives: www.ctcl.org
Hobsons' CollegeView: www.collegeview.com
KnowHow2Go: www.knowhow2go.org
Peterson's: www.petersons.com
The Common Application: www.commonapp.org
Undocumented Students:
www.nacacnet.org/UndocumentedStudents
Universal College Application:
www.universalcollegeapp.com

Financial Aid and Scholarship information

College ScoreCard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>
CSS/Financial Aid Profile:
<https://profileonline.collegeboard.org>
FAFSA4caster: www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov
Fastweb: www.fastweb.com
Federal Student Aid: <http://studentaid.ed.gov>
FindTuition: www.findtuition.com
Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):
www.fafsa.gov
Sallie Mae: www.salliemae.com
The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid:
www.finaid.org

Testing

ACT Fee Waiver: www.actstudent.org/faq/feewaiver.html
ACT: www.act.org
Test Prep from Number2.com: www.number2.com
Kaplan Test Prep: www.kaptest.com
PSAT 10 and PSAT/NMSQT: www.psat.org
SAT Fee Waiver: www.sat.org/fee-waivers
SAT Prep from Khan Academy: www.satpractice.org
SAT: www.sat.org
The Princeton Review: www.princetonreview.com

Non-Profit Organizations

First In The Family: www.firstinthefamily.org/highschool
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities:
www.hacu.net
National Association for College Admission
Counseling: www.nacacnet.org
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher
Education: www.nafeonation.org
United Negro College Fund (UNCF): www.uncf.org

Athletics

Athletic Aid: www.athleticaid.com
National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics: <http://naia.org>
NCAA Eligibility Center:
www.ncaa.org/eligibility-center

Careers

The Occupational Outlook Handbook:
www.bls.gov/ooh
Roadmap to Careers:
<https://collegeboard.roadtripnation.com>

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Activity #3: Making the Most of a Campus Visit

Opening Discussion

To introduce this activity, ask students to consider the following: People who want to buy a car often spend a lot of time test-driving cars, but once they buy one and drive it off the lot, the car depreciates in value. The opposite is true of test-driving a college: The time a student spends visiting a college can help him or her know if the school is a good fit. Once the student enrolls in a college, the school never loses value. For students who may not have opportunities to visit college campuses, attending college fairs and visiting with college representatives who come to their high schools provide a reasonable substitute.

Activity/Handouts

Campus Visits**The College Visit Checklist****Campus Visit Checklist****College Comparison**

Instructions

Review the College Visit Checklist

1. Go over "The Campus Visit" allowing time for questions and discussion.
2. Give each student the "College Visit Checklist" and talk about how the list can also be useful if a student attends a college fair.
3. Describe what occurs on a college tour and in an information session.
4. Talk about how students can possibly use the campus visit as a time to have an interview, if the college requires or allows one.
5. Emphasize the importance of filling in the comparison sheet as soon after a visit as possible and securing the name and contact information of someone in the admission office.
6. Give students the names of four schools nearby and ask them to find out when the schools schedule tours and information sessions. Students should use the available resources to find this information.
7. Describe the differences among safety, match, and reach schools.

Campus Visits

One of the most important parts of your college research is the campus visit. Visiting the colleges on your list will give you a firsthand impression of the students, faculty, staff, facilities, and programs. On a visit you can learn what the admission office is looking for in its applicants, gain a feeling for the academic and social atmosphere, see the study/living/recreation facilities, talk with students, and get a sense of the community.

When to Visit:

- Admission offices are open all year, but visiting when classes are in session is best. If you visit in the summer, you can certainly learn about admission and get a general tour of the campus, but it might be hard to get a good sense of the atmosphere of the college.
- The best time to visit? Spring Break of your junior year can be ideal. Even if you aren't certain where you might eventually apply, if you can visit one large, one medium size, and one small school, you will be better prepared to make final decisions about where to apply.
- Once you have narrowed your list in the fall of the senior year, you may want to make return overnight visits to schools to which you will be applying. On these visits, plan to go to classes and interact with students.
- If at all possible, try to visit colleges before you apply. You may discover the school isn't at all what you had thought it would be. However, attending accepted students visit programs at the colleges you have visited previously can help you narrow down your choices.
- Some colleges will offer spring programs for juniors and fall programs for seniors. Check online or contact the admission office since you may need to make a reservation.

Plan Your Visit:

- A good campus visit takes two-four hours, including time to get a sense of the surrounding town or area. Don't try to visit more than two schools in one day.
- Figure out an itinerary: where you want to travel, how you will travel, how far one school is from another.
- Call the admission office at least two weeks ahead of time to schedule your visit. Admission offices have set times for tours and information.
- Think of all the things you want to do when you visit and ask what the admission office can help you with: talking with an admission officer, taking a tour, attending a class, meeting with a professor in an area that interests you, eating a meal on campus, talking with a coach or advisor of an extracurricular activity that interests you, etc.
- Research each college before you go visit and make a list of specific questions to ask.
- Contact students you might know at the school before you plan to visit.

When You Visit:

- Focus on people, places, and programs during your visit.
- Talk to as many people as you can: students, dining hall workers, tour guides, faculty.
- Look at a campus newspaper and check out campus bulletin boards.
- Wander through snack bars and student centers and observe how students interact with each other.
- Keep track of all names of people you talk with, especially in the admission office.
- Attend an admission session and take an official tour. Listen to the tour guide, but don't jump to a conclusion about a particular school based solely on your experience with a tour guide.
- If you are meeting or interviewing with an admission staff member, be on time, be yourself, ask questions that deal with your particular needs, and make sure you mention anything about your background or achievements that you want the admission office to know.

After the Visit:

- Fill out the college comparison sheet before you get to another campus.
- Send a thank you note to any admission person you meet.
- Look ahead to fall of the senior year to plan a follow-up, overnight visit.

DECIDE

College Visit Checklist

To help you find the right college, fill out one of these forms each time you visit a school.

College Name

City

State

Size

Tuition

Room/Board

Financial Aid Options

Admissions Contact

Name

Email

Phone

To-Do Checklist

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Talk to professors | ☐ Talk to students |
| ☐ Visit the library | ☐ Visit student housing |
| ☐ Tour campus | ☐ Read bulletin boards |
| ☐ Sit in on a class | ☐ Check out recreational facilities |
| ☐ Eat at a cafeteria | ☐ Check out student activities |
| ☐ Talk to an admissions counselor | ☐ Tour the city around campus |
| ☐ Read the college newspaper | ☐ Eat at an off-campus student hang-out |
| ☐ Check out computer labs | ☐ Picture yourself living here |

Rate It

On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the best, rate the following:

- People _____
- Social Life _____
- Classrooms _____
- Residence Halls _____
- Town _____
- Campus _____
- Food _____

Ask a Student

What is the best part about this college?

What is the worst part?

What is a typical day like?

What do the students do on the weekends?

How are classes structured?

Why did you choose this college?

The Best Part About My Visit

The Worst Part About My Visit



Campus Visit Checklist

When you visit a campus, it is important that you ask the right types of questions:

Look at Equipment and School Facilities

- ☐ Are the facilities and equipment up-to-date and operating?
- ☐ Is the equipment similar to what you will be using on the job?
- ☐ Is the library good for studying and research?
- ☐ How large are the dorm rooms? What types of furniture are provided/allowed?
- ☐ Are the dorm rooms quiet enough for studying?
- ☐ What is the cafeteria like?
- ☐ Are there plenty of computer labs?
- ☐ Do students get free e-mail and Internet access?

Sit in on a Class or Two

- ☐ Do the instructors seem knowledgeable?
- ☐ Are the students participating in classroom activities?
- ☐ What kinds of work are the students doing?
- ☐ How large/small are the classes?

Talk with Current Students in the Program

- ☐ How long have they been in school?
- ☐ Are they learning what they need to know to get a job?
- ☐ What is their opinion of the instructors? Are instructors available outside of class?
- ☐ Do the instructors spend time with them to be sure they understand the material?
- ☐ How much time is needed for studying and other work outside class?
- ☐ Have they had any problems with the school, the instructors or the classes?
- ☐ What do they like most/least about the school/program?
- ☐ How do they spend their free time?
- ☐ What are the other students like?

Talk with Instructors in the Program

- ☐ What are the academic requirements in the program?
- ☐ What kinds of courses are offered? How often are they offered?
- ☐ How many students are in the program? How many are accepted into the program each year?
- ☐ How long does it take most students to complete the program?
- ☐ How long have they taught at the school? Do they teach full time or part time?
- ☐ What background do they have in the field? How does it relate to the courses they teach?
- ☐ What types of activities are they involved in that relate to the field of study?

Talk with an Admissions Counselor

- ☐ Has the institution and its programs been accredited by a recognized accrediting association?
- ☐ What are the admissions requirements for the college or for a specific program?
- ☐ How do you apply and which forms do you fill out?
- ☐ When are the important deadlines for admissions?
- ☐ Will your family's ability to pay for college be a factor in the admissions process?
- ☐ What are the housing requirements and parking rules?
- ☐ What types of extracurricular activities are available?
- ☐ Can credits be earned online or transferred from other colleges?
- ☐ What percentage of first-year students return the following year?
- ☐ What percentage of graduates are employed within one year?

Talk with a Financial Aid Counselor

- ☐ How much does it cost to attend the college (including tuition, room and board, fees, etc.)?
- ☐ What financial aid options are available?
- ☐ Does the school participate in federal and state aid programs? (Not all schools are eligible.)
- ☐ What percentage of undergraduates receive aid? How much do they receive on average?
- ☐ Which financial aid forms do you need to fill out and what are the deadlines?
- ☐ Does the college offer scholarships? Who is most likely to receive them? How do you apply?
- ☐ Will private/non-government scholarships reduce the amount of need-based aid you receive?
- ☐ How is financial aid paid out? When will you receive it?

College Comparison

College Names	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
Location – contact information - distance from home - admission staff contact - email/phone number			
Size - student enrollment - physical size of campus			
Environment - type of school (2 yr., 4 yr.) - school setting (urban, rural) - nearest city - co-ed, male, female - religious affiliation - diversity			
Admission Requirements - deadline - tests required - average test scores, GPA, rank - would it be “safety”, “match” or “reach”?			
Academics - your major offered - special requirements - accreditation - student-faculty ratio - typical class size			
College Expenses - tuition, room and board - estimated cost of attendance - application fee, deposits			
Financial Aid - deadline - required forms % receiving aid - scholarships			
Housing - residence hall requirement - food plan - on/off campus			
Facilities - academic - recreational - other			
Activities - clubs, organizations - Greek life - athletics, intramurals - other			