

- *Visits by college representatives and college fairs.* You can make use of the resources your school provides for students to research colleges. Experienced counselors recommend attending as many college rep visits to your school as you can. Not only will you be able to assist students with information they missed or didn't understand, you can help them distinguish between the marketing hype and the useful facts. College fairs also offer counselors (as well as students) the opportunity to talk to several reps in one night.
- *Counselor days/reverse college days.* Some colleges and counseling organizations sponsor programs that bring the school counselors to the college rather than the college representatives to the high schools. Counselors spend the day at various colleges talking to admissions deans. New and experienced counselors often like these programs because you can learn about quirks in a specific college's admission requirements. Also, local colleges sometimes ask school counselors to sit in on a typical admission session to observe how the application packet is reviewed.
- *Join NACAC's MemberToMember (M2M) Community and Public Forum.* M2M is an online, member-inclusive network where members can connect and share information. In the Public Forum, members and nonmembers can discuss topics related to the college admission process.

Visits from college representatives

College representatives will visit your school in the fall to meet with interested students. As more and more students apply to college early in their senior year, it is a good idea to allow juniors and even sophomores to meet with college reps so they can sail into their senior year having made a personal connection to some colleges. The reps meet with students in small-group sessions and discuss academic programs, campus life, financial aid and admission procedures.

If your students are interested in a college that does not traditionally have a rep visit your school, call the admission office and ask if a visit can be scheduled. Colleges are eager to meet prospective applicants.

TIP

"I meet with every student every year (310 students). Many have special needs. For several years we have **gone to the local community college** and used computers there to research colleges — it's an all-morning activity. And, of course, the college wants us there! This year the community college decided to bring its new mobile lab to our school. Every junior is required to participate. Of course, some students forget what they learned about colleges within a week, but for many, it's a great way to start this exploration."

— **Pat Rambo**, Springfield High School, Pennsylvania

TIP

"I encourage students to **email the college representatives** who visit our school. It's nice to have that personal touch, and it gives students experience with communicating in the adult world"

— **Lisa Sohmer**, Garden School, New York

TIP

“Bridges’ Choices Planner does a good job assessing **trade schools and certificate-level programs**, like automotive or cosmetology programs.

We have significant numbers of students considering technical training beyond high school in addition to our traditional college-going population.”

— **Tom McNeil**, Winslow High School, Maine

A counselor should be available, whenever possible, to greet the college rep. In a recent discussion on the NACAC website on the topic of whether college Websites have reduced the need for college rep visits, many college representatives said not only did they value the visit, but a chief goal was to meet the *counselors*, and to create or perpetuate a relationship with them.

Students should be encouraged to meet with a number of college representatives. Quite often, the rep will be a reader of their application, and putting a face to a name is always helpful. Students might decide a college is not right for them after the rep visit — that helps them better define the type of school they are looking for.

If possible, sit in on the rep’s presentation. Often, students are shy, and the counselor can ease the tension by asking a few questions to get the discussion going. In addition, attending presentations is an excellent way to know what a college is really like. Be sure to get copies of recent materials from the rep to update your files.

Make sure all college reps receive each of these items:

- A school profile
- A college statistics list (colleges that students from your school have attended in recent years)
- Your business card
- Directions to other local high schools

Finally, make sure the representative feels welcome and appreciated. If possible, provide a quiet location in which they can meet with students (not the cafeteria during lunch). A convenient parking spot should be arranged if possible, and lunch or a snack should be provided if they are coming at midday. All of this can go a long way toward leaving reps with a positive impression of the school and its students.

You and your students can prepare for a rep’s presentation. See **Handout 3E:** *Questions to ask college representatives.*

STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING WHAT COLLEGES ARE REALLY LIKE

“If at all possible, sit in on every college rep’s visit to your school.”

— **Steve DiPietro**, former school counselor

“I go on college tours (usually the counselor pays the air fare, and the colleges provide transportation, housing and meals). And whenever I’m near a college, I take the student tour. If it’s a college my students are typically interested in, I contact the person in admission who will be reading the applications from my school and talk with them.”

— **Peggy Hock**, co-director of college counseling, Notre Dame High School, California

“Combine brief college visits with your family vacation plans. If you are on a tight budget over the summer, ask about an overnight stay in a dormitory. Many colleges will be happy to accommodate you and your family in return for an hour or two of your time.”

— **William Yarwood**, Moorestown High School, New Jersey

“Not all online college search programs are legit. Some sites don’t actually have an official association. I check websites to see if they have any information for counselors. This usually tells me if they are legit or not.”

— **Tamuriel Grace-McKinley**, Beloit Memorial High School, Wisconsin

“It’s really important for counselors to visit colleges. They learn a lot about one college specifically, but they also learn about colleges in general, even from a single visit. And, of course, the bonding that occurs with the other counselors is of lasting value.”

— **Lynda Molyneaux**, Central High School, Nebraska

“If there is a college that you need to learn more about because your students are applying or plan to apply there, call the admission office and schedule a visit. You are all in the same business — they want to get to know counselors and prospective students.”

— **Susie Rusk**, counselor coordinator, Washoe County School District, Nevada

College planning: How to get started

Get started.

Assess your strengths, weaknesses, goals, passions, learning style and social skills. What is most important to you in the college-search process? What do you hope to gain from the process?

Make some basic decisions.

Where do you want to live? Will you go to college full-time? Part-time? Do you want to attend a single-sex school, a technical college, a public or private college, a large university, a small liberal arts college, or a historically black or religiously affiliated college? How important to you is the cultural/ideological diversity of the student body?

Enlist help.

Who do you want to assist you in this process (parents, teachers, siblings, relatives, friends)?

Consult references and websites.

Look at college directories (*College Board College Handbook*, Barron's, Peterson's) and use college searches (www.collegeboard.org). Visit the websites of the colleges that interest you.

Talk with your teachers and your school counselor about your dreams and goals.

Discuss your plans with your parents. Ask for their advice.

Meet with college representatives when they visit the school.

The guidance office will post information on upcoming visits. Have questions ready.

Visit campuses every chance you get.

Take a tour, meet with an admissions representative and ask students what they think of the college.

Source: Amherst Regional High School, Massachusetts

Handout 3A

College resources for students and families

General websites

Campus Tours: Virtual College Tours. Virtual tours with still pictures and descriptions, webcams, campus maps and videos of hundreds of colleges throughout the United States. Provides a first look at colleges. www.campustours.com.

The College Board. A complete site, with college and scholarship searches, information about the SAT® and SAT Subject Tests™, and other material pertaining to the college search and application process. Easy-to-use college search feature. www.collegeboard.org.

eCampusTours.com. Virtual tours of colleges. Useful for its 360-degree views of dorm rooms and other buildings. www.ecampustours.com.

NCAA Eligibility Center. Official NCAA website that gives details of student-eligibility requirements to play NCAA sports. Watch this site for changes in eligibility; students can print the “*Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete*.” <http://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common/>

Peterson’s Education Portal. An all-purpose site including a college search, as well as information about summer programs, summer camps and jobs. The site asks you to register before using some of the search engines and other resources, but there is no registration fee. There is a charge for some of the services provided. www.petersons.com.

U.S. Department of Education. The federal government’s website is easy to use and an excellent source of information on financial aid, much of it in Spanish as well as English. www.ed.gov.

Financial aid websites

The College Board. Has a scholarship search, a loan calculator and an online application form for the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE® form, which is required by some colleges. www.collegeboard.org.

FAFSA on the Web. The website for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This form must be submitted in the senior year (after January 1 and by June 30) for families applying for need-based aid. Students may complete it electronically at this site. www.fafsa.ed.gov.

FastWeb. Extensive information on merit- and need-based scholarships and aid. www.fastweb.com.

FinAid! Good site for information about types of financial aid and applying for financial aid. www.finaid.org.

Books

Comprehensive objective directories

Barron’s Profiles of American Colleges. New York: Barron’s Educational Series, Inc. Updated every two years.

The College Board College Handbook. New York: The College Board. Published annually.

Peterson’s Guide to Four-Year Colleges. Princeton, NJ: Peterson’s Guides. Published annually.

Peterson’s Guide to Two-Year Colleges. Princeton, NJ: Peterson’s Guides. Published annually.

College resources for students and families (page 2)

Subjective guides

Fiske, Edward, and Robert Logue (contributor). *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*. Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks Trade. Updated annually.

Greene, Howard, and Matthew W. Greene. *Greene's Guide to Educational Planning: The Public Ivies*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Greene, Howard R., and Matthew W. Greene. *The Hidden Ivies: Thirty Colleges of Excellence*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.

Pope, Loren. *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even If You're Not a Straight-A Student*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Staff of *Yale Daily News*. *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Updated annually.

Specialized topics

Aaron, Scott. *Jewish U: A Contemporary Guide for the Jewish College Student*. New York: Urj Press, 2010

College Board Book of Majors. New York: The College Board. Published annually.

Detailed descriptions, written by professors, of more than 180 popular majors, plus lists of 900 majors and the colleges that offer them.

Getting Financial Aid. New York: The College Board. Published annually.

Mathews, Jay. *Harvard Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College That Is Best For You*. New York: Prima Publishing, 2003. Good insights on the college choice process from the education columnist for the *Washington Post*.

Nelson Reference. *Nelson's Complete Guide to Colleges & Universities for Christians*. 2002.

Princeton Review et al. (eds.). *The Hillel Guide to Jewish Life on Campus*. 14th ed. New York: Random House Information Group, 1999.

Princeton Review et al. (eds.). *K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder*. 8th ed. New York: Random House Information Group, 2005.

Schoem, David. *College Knowledge: 101 Tips for the College-Bound Student*. University of Michigan Press, 2005. Practical advice on how to become engaged in college intellectual and cultural life.

Windmeyer, Shane L. *The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students*. Boston: Alyson Publications, 2006.

College questionnaire for parents or guardians

Name of Student: _____

1. Do you have a preference for how far from home your child's college is located?
2. Do you have a preference for an urban, suburban or small-town campus?
3. Indicate any preferences you have for the location of your child's college:
 - Southeast Midwest
 - Southwest Northeast
 - West Coast No preference
 - Northwest
4. Do you have a specific preference for:
 - a public college/university?
 - a private college/university?
 - a college with a religious affiliation?
 - no preference
5. Please list specific colleges/universities you would like your child to learn about.

6. What particular area of study interests your child?

College questionnaire for parents or guardians (page 2)

7. How do you view your child's actual academic progress so far?

8. What do you believe are your child's strengths in applying for college?
 - a. Academic strengths:

 - b. Other strengths:

9. You are invited to write a letter to the college counselor describing your child, specifically narrating events or anecdotes that characterize or illustrate your child's personality. What would you like us to know about your son or daughter? What experiences have shaped his or her personality? What makes your child special? Are there special circumstances you would like the college adviser to know about that would help with the college search? What do you hope your child will gain from the college experience?

Parent/Guardian Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Source: *Susan Staggers, Cary Academy, North Carolina*