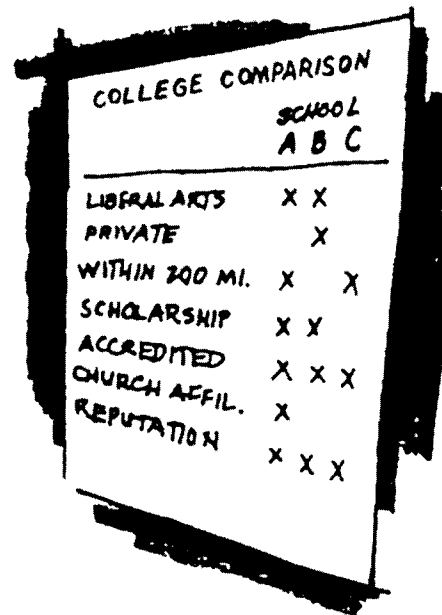


Step
4

Investigate and Compare Colleges

- Prepare a college comparison checklist
- Weigh advantages and disadvantages
- Contact the admissions office
- Schedule appointments for your campus visits



A hand-drawn checklist titled "COLLEGE COMPARISON" comparing three schools (A, B, and C) across various criteria. The criteria and their corresponding marks are:

	SCHOOL		
	A	B	C
LIBERAL ARTS	X	X	
PRIVATE		X	
WITHIN 200 MI.	X		X
SCHOLARSHIP	X	X	
ACCREDITED	X	X	X
CHURCH AFFIL.	X		
REPUTATION	X	X	X

Every "campus" has a "personality."

College Visits

Considering the financial investment made in a four year college education a campus visit should be an essential part of that decision. A campus visit can help you decide what you are looking for and what it would be like to live on campus. Economics may prevent you from visiting all the schools to which you have applied, however, you should definitely visit all those that offer you admission.

Preparing for your visit:

A practical minimum for a college visit is a half day, however, an overnight visit is ideal and most colleges can make arrangements for you to stay in a dorm with a student.

Most college admissions offices will help make arrangements for visits to the campus. It is much better and more efficient to telephone and find out immediately what is available to you than to exchange requests and possibilities by mail. Make arrangements to have a guided tour of the campus, a classroom visit and visit with a professor. Ask the admission officer for travel directions, a campus map, a college catalogue and campus parking instructions. You may also want to inquire about campus activities scheduled during your visit and names of college students from your hometown that you may contact. If you have a special talent or area of interest you may want to ask to include a visit with people in this area. Be sure to contact the admissions office well in advance of your intended visit to avoid any scheduling problems.

Be prepared for your visit by reading the college catalogue and other materials the college may have sent you. It is a waste of everyone's time and reflects poorly on you when you ask questions that are already covered in their printed materials. Use the checklist on the following page to be sure you are on time and at the correct locations for your visit.

A tour of the campus should include most of the following:

1. Financial Aid Office
2. Library
3. Housing
4. Student Dining Areas
5. Students
6. Faculty
7. Special talent or interest
8. Religious Organizations on Campus
9. Extra Curricular activities
10. Campus Atmosphere



Parents should have their most active participation in visiting with the financial aid office. Ask about the typical aid package, how are they awarded and what percentage of students receive financial aid. Also ask for the average amount of financial aid per student receiving aid.

At the library the student should be concerned with quality and quantity of research materials, but most importantly, how accessible they are. Talk to the library staff to determine procedures and library hours.

Always talk with students. They will give you candid information and will usually give both the good and bad they see in their own school. Approach students anywhere on campus and ask questions about the college's academic strengths, social life, and what they like or don't like about their college. Check the student bulletin boards and school newspaper to see if their extra curricular opportunities interest you.

Try to visit with at least one faculty member, either by appointment or stop in and ask someone you see in their office. Don't expect to take a lot of their time, however, most will be willing to talk with you and your parents about the university and especially what their department has to offer.

Learn what your housing options are and take a look at the dormitories. Plan to eat a meal in the cafeteria and see what study facilities are available in your dorm.

If you are having an interview make it after your tour of the campus. You will be better prepared and probably have more knowledgeable questions to ask.

Don't be intimidated by size. You will end up having about the same number of close friends at a large as well as a small school. Don't look for an ideal college, every school will have some flaws. Don't pretend to be someone you are not and don't let your parents run the visit. Ideally parents should be part of the visit, however, this is a good chance for you to present yourself as mature and independent. Don't let one unusually good or one unusually bad experience influence your choice. Look for an overall feeling that a college is a good "match" for you, your abilities, interest and goals.

Be sure to write thank you notes to everyone who was helpful in your visit. A thank you note is both polite and a reminder of your interest.

Campus Visit Checklist

Name of College _____

Date and time of visit _____

Address and travel instructions _____

Contact Person _____

Admissions Office phone number _____

Date and time of visit _____

Campus tour _____

Places to see _____

Names of faculty appointments _____

Classes and social events to attend _____

Dormitory to visit _____

Student host _____

Campus visits

There's no substitute for seeing a college yourself!

There are lots of ways to find out about a college, from brochures to videos to college fairs.

But the bottom line is that

nothing beats the test of going to a college and seeing it for yourself.

Here are some ideas to help you make the most of a campus visit.

Before you go

Call the admissions office in advance

Just as there's no substitute for seeing a college firsthand, there's no substitute for advance planning.

When you call the admissions office, tell them the date you'd like to visit and the time of day you expect to arrive.

If you want to stay overnight in a residence hall, ask if they can make arrangements.

Also, find out about lining up an interview (if they offer them and you'd like one) or attending an information session, visiting classes and talking with faculty.

Read up on the college and think about questions

Go back through the information you've collected about the college. Check the resources at your school's guidance office and browse the college's Web site, if possible.

This research will help you

think of questions to ask and aspects of the college to explore while you're there.

The other side of this page has lists of questions to help you get started. As you think of other questions, write them down.

While you're there

Talk to as many students as you can

Once you're on campus, try to take advantage of a variety of ways to learn about the college:

- Meet with an admissions officer or attend an information session
- Take a tour of the campus
- Sit in on a class

- Have a meal in the cafeteria
- Pick up copies of the student newspaper and alumni magazine.

Throughout your visit, talk to as many students as you can and don't be bashful about asking questions!

Prepare for the interview

If you have scheduled an interview, take along your list of questions, so you're sure to cover everything you wanted to find out.

You'll probably be asked about your academic background,

interests, hobbies, goals and why you're interested in the college, so be ready to talk about that.

As with any interview, be on time, or call ahead if you know you'll be delayed.

Take time to look around on your own

Take some time to explore the campus on your own and absorb the atmosphere. While

organized activities can give you information you can't get on your own, the reverse is true, too.

A campus visit is informative at any time, but it's best to see a college in action, when students are in classes.

Colleges encourage visits, but their schedules for tours, interviews and overnight stays might fill up early. Call ahead!

Have some extra time during your visit? Stop by the campus coffee shop or grill, read bulletin boards, try to strike up conversations with students, or go to a play or lecture.

Nervous about the interview? That's natural. Try to look at it as a conversation in which you ask questions, too. You'll be more likely to relax, be yourself and enjoy it.

Lots and lots of ????

You've probably already thought of lots of questions to ask during your campus visit.

Here are some suggestions, but be sure to ask the questions that are important to YOU.

When you talk to students, ask . . .

1. How many hours a week do you study? Is that typical here?
2. Are faculty members interested in students and accessible outside of class?
3. Do many students go home on weekends?
4. Are the athletic facilities open to all students or only to athletes?
5. Is it possible to study in your dorm room?
6. Is the food good?
7. Are campus jobs readily available?
8. Is there easy access to computers? Where are they located?
9. What's the library like as a place to study? to do research?
10. What do you like most about this college? least?
11. How easy is it to get the classes you want?
12. If you could change something about this school, what would it be?

If you attend a class, ask yourself . . .

1. Are students prepared for the class? Do they seem interested in the material?
2. Do I feel that the students are learning—either new facts or new ways of thinking about a subject?
3. Is there time for questions and discussion? Do students participate?
4. Am I intellectually challenged by what is taking place in the class?
5. Is there good rapport between professors and students?

As you tour the campus, ask yourself . . .

1. Are the buildings in good repair? the grounds well-kept?
2. Are the residence halls pleasant and quiet enough to study in? Are there laundry and kitchen facilities?
3. What's the cafeteria like?
4. Are computers and lab equipment up-to-date and plentiful?
5. What's the surrounding town or city like?

In an interview or information session, you could ask . . .

1. Does the college have academic programs that fit my interests?
2. Where are computer terminals located? Will I have to pay extra for computer time?
3. Will I have access to special equipment (such as an electron microscope) as a first-year student?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the college's advising system?
5. How many students will there be in courses I'm likely to take in my first year? Are those courses taught by professors or graduate assistants?
6. What kinds of campus jobs are available for first-year students?
7. Will there be any new programs or facilities in the next two years?
8. What are the college's recent graduates doing now?

Write down your impressions

1. Were the people you met friendly? Did they answer your questions fully and candidly?
2. What do you think of the quality of instruction and the academic atmosphere?
3. Were the students the kind of people you'd like to get to know?
4. Did you like the social atmosphere?
5. Would you like to spend more time there?

People's views about a college or university can vary widely, so try to talk with as many people as possible.

Write down your questions so you'll remember them and can refer to them during your visit.

As you tour the campus and talk with people, ask yourself whether this is a place where you'd feel comfortable and able to learn and do your best.

Are you interested in any extra-curricular activities? If so, ask about them and try to see the facilities.

If possible, write down your impressions of the college while they're still fresh in your mind.

After the visit

TOUGH QUESTIONS TO ASK ANY ADMISSIONS OFFICER

By Robert G. McLendon

As a college admissions officer for the past fourteen years, it is clear to me that today's prospective students are carefully comparing colleges and striving to learn all they can about the colleges to which they apply. The age group of 18 to 24 year old is declining in the United States, and this is creating a type of "buyer's market" in the market place of higher education.

In order to assure yourself that your expectations of a college are met, you, the student consumer, need not hesitate to ask admissions officers some "tough questions." This article will offer you a few suggestions of some tough "tough questions." This article will offer you a few suggestions of some tough questions that I hope will help you make the right choice when selecting a college.

Academic Questions

1. How many students in last year's freshman class returned for their sophomore year?
2. What percent of the freshman class obtained a 2.00 (C) average or above last year?
3. If accepted, will you tell me my predicted freshman grade-point average?
Many colleges use a mathematical formula based on studies of currently enrolled students to predict an applicant's freshman grade average.
4. What is the college's procedure for class placement?
This is especially important in the areas of English and mathematics because freshman often vary significantly in their ability to handle these important academic skills.
5. What procedure is used to assign a faculty advisor when the student is undecided as to the major area of study?
6. What type of additional academic services does your college offer at no additional cost to the student? (e.g., tutoring, career or personal counseling, study-skills workshops, improving reading speed, etc.)?
7. How effective is your college's honor code? What is the penalty for cheating?

Social Questions

1. What is the average age of your student body and what percent resides on campus?
Many colleges today have a large and increasing population of commuting part-time adult students and a dwindling enrollment of 17 to 18 year old full-time, degree-seeking students residing on campus.
2. Is your college a "suitcase college" on the weekends? If not, what are some typical weekend activities for students on your campus?
3. What procedure is used to select roommates if no preference is listed?
4. What are some of the causes of students being suspended or dismissed from your college? Is there a system of appeal for those who have been dismissed?
5. How can a prospective student arrange a campus visit?
Clearly the best possible way to evaluate a college socially is to plan a visit to the campus. When you visit, try not to be shy. After your talk and tour with the admissions officer, walk around by yourself and informally ask students their opinions. A good place to chat with students is in the college's student center or at the dining hall.
6. What are some of the rules and regulations that govern residence hall life? Are there coeducational halls?

Financial Questions

1. What percent of your students received financial aid based on financial need?
2. What percent of your students received scholarships based on academic ability?
3. What percent of a typical financial aid offer is in the form of a loan?
4. How much did your college increase cost (room, board, tuition, and fees) from last year to current year?
5. If an accepted student must submit a room deposit, when is the deposit due, and when is it refundable? The deposit should be refundable in full up to May 1, if the college or university is a member of the National Association of College Admissions Counselors.
6. If my family demonstrates a financial need on the FAF or FFS forms; what percent of the established need will typically be awarded? When can I expect to receive an official financial aid award letter?

The distinguishing quality of any person is the quality of the mind, and the college you select will have a long-lasting impact on your career and life. I realize that you are painfully aware of the need to make the right college choice because most high school students realize the college years are often the most productive stage of life. Knowing what questions to ask an admissions officer is an important part of this decision-making process. Most admissions officers want you to ask "tough questions" because if you make the wrong choice we, too, have failed in our job.

Bob McLendon is Vice President for Enrollment Planning, Dean of Admissions, and Financial Aid at Lambeth College, Jackson, Tennessee. He served on the Admissions Practices Committee of the National Association of College Admissions Counselors and has been Chairman of the Admissions Practices Committee of the Southern Association of College Admissions Counselors. He is a member of the Executive Board of SACAC and President-Elect of the Carolinas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.



College Comparison Worksheet



COLLEGE NAME			
LOCATION ● distance from home			
SIZE ● enrollment ● physical size of campus			
ENVIRONMENT ● type of school (2 yr., 4 yr.) ● school setting (urban, rural) ● location & size of nearest city ● co-ed, male, female ● religious affiliation			
ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS ● deadline ● tests required ● average test scores, GPA, rank ● special requirements ● notification			
ACADEMICS ● your major offered ● special requirements ● accreditation ● student-faculty ratio ● typical class size			
COLLEGE EXPENSES ● tuition, room & board ● estimated total budget ● application fee, deposits			
FINANCIAL AID ● deadline ● required forms ● % receiving aid ● scholarships			
HOUSING ● residence hall requirement ● availability ● types and sizes ● food plan			
FACILITIES ● academic ● recreational ● other			
ACTIVITIES ● clubs, organizations ● greek life ● athletics, intramurals ● other			
CAMPUS VISITS ● when ● special opportunities			

College Admission and Financial Aid Logs

College _____ Telephone No. _____

Address _____

College Admission Log

Application Deadline and Fees:

Date _____ \$ _____

Application Form:

Requested from college Yes Date _____

Submitted to college Yes Date _____

Other Steps Required:

Tests required or recommended _____

- Test registration completed Yes Date _____

- Test taken Yes Date _____

- Results forwarded to college Yes Date _____

Necessary high school courses completed Yes

High school transcript submitted Yes Date _____

References submitted Yes Date _____

Interview completed Yes Date _____

College Reply:

Expected reply date _____

College decision _____

Contact person _____

Follow-Up Required:

1. _____ Date _____

2. _____ Date _____

3. _____ Date _____

4. _____ Date _____

5. _____ Date _____

College Admissions Office Notified of Your Decision:

Yes Date _____

Special Notes:

Financial Aid Log

Application Deadline:

Date _____

Application Form:

Requested from college Yes Date _____

Submitted to college Yes Date _____

Need Analysis Forms:

Which one(s): _____

Forms Completed Yes Date _____

Results forwarded to college Yes Date _____

College Reply:

Expected reply date _____

College decision _____

Contact person _____

Follow-Up Required:

1. _____ Date _____

2. _____ Date _____

3. _____ Date _____

4. _____ Date _____

5. _____ Date _____

College Admissions Office Notified of Your Decision:

Yes Date _____

Special Notes:

**Sample
Letter**

Your Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Date

Office of Admissions
Name of College
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a student at _____ High School and will graduate in _____, 20____.
(month)

Please send me an application for admission and information about your college—a general information bulletin, college costs, and program descriptions. I am considering _____ as my major field of study.

My parents and I also want to investigate all possible sources of financial aid. Please send us an application form, instructions about application procedures (how and when to apply), and any other information that might be helpful.

I am interested in visiting your campus, taking a campus tour, and meeting with an Admissions Counselor. I would also like to meet with an advisor in the (major) _____ department, if possible. Please advise me of a time on _____ (month/date) that would be convenient.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

(Your Signature)
Name

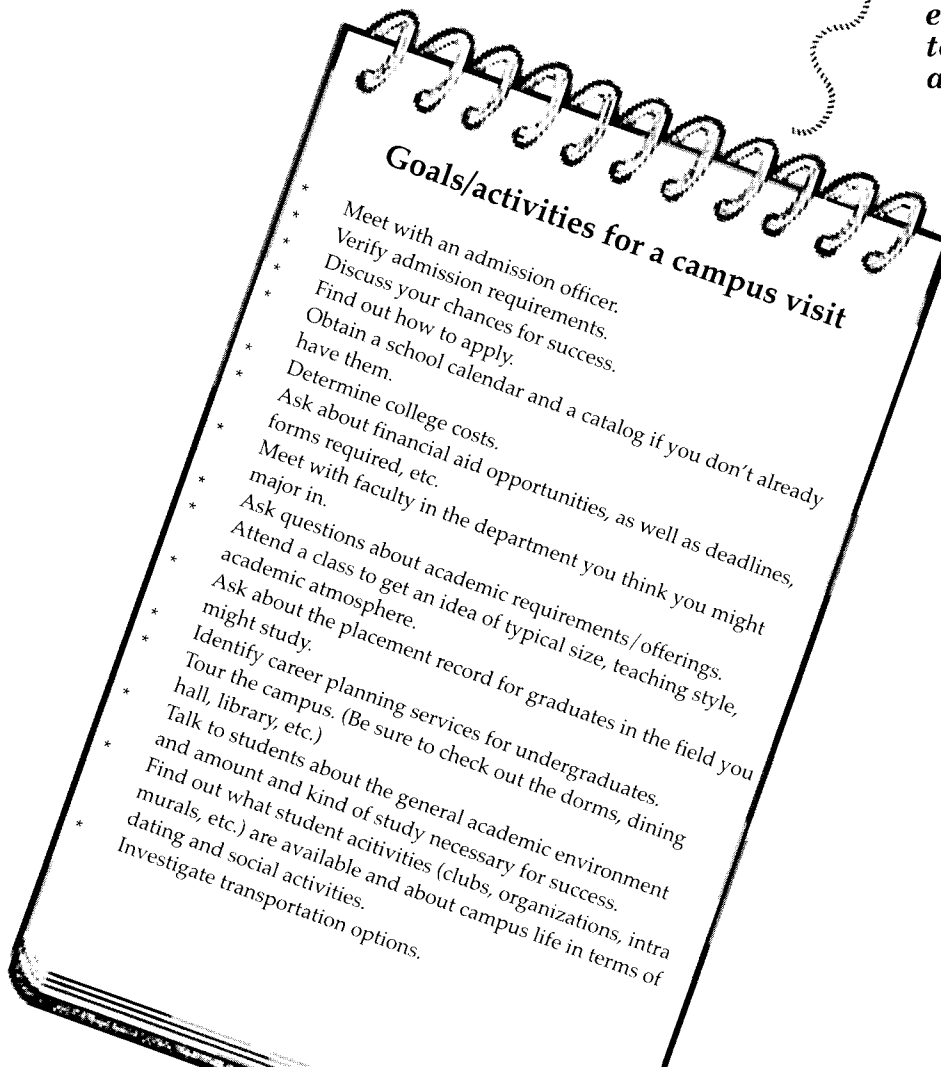
Before you even leave your home, you can begin the college planning process by writing for information.

This sample letter includes requests for:

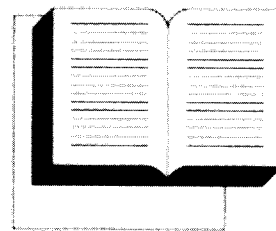
- GENERAL INFORMATION
- APPLICATION FORMS
- A CAMPUS VISIT

You can modify this letter to accommodate your unique needs.

Many colleges encourage telephone inquiries and requests.



Glossary of Terms for College-Bound Students and Parents



Accreditation: recognition of a college or university by any of the regional or national accrediting bodies indicating that the institution as a whole has been judged to be meeting its objectives.

ACT Assessment (ACT): the group of tests, administered by The American College Testing Program and required or recommended by many colleges as part of the admission process. They measure educational development in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning. Given at specified test centers throughout the year.

Advanced placement: granting of credit and/or assignment to an advanced course on the basis of evidence that the student has mastered the equivalent of an introductory course.

College Calendars:

Traditional semester: Two approximately equal semesters

Early semester: Two semesters, first semester completed before Christmas

Quarter: Three equal terms of about 12 weeks each

Trimester: Calendar year divided into three equal semesters, third semester replaces summer school

4-1-4: Two equal terms of about 16 weeks each, with a 4-week interim term

Career-oriented program: a group of courses which prepares students primarily for employment, often in a specific occupation. Such a program, which can last a few months or more than two years, may lead to a certificate, diploma, or associate degree.

College transfer courses: courses intended for transfer of college credit to bachelor's degree programs elsewhere.

Cooperative work-study education: a program in which the student alternates between full-time college study and full-time paid employment related to the area of study. Under this plan, the bachelor's degree often requires five years to complete.

Credit by examination: a program through which some colleges grant course credit based on results of ACT scores or SAT Achievement scores, the ACT Proficiency Examination Program (PEP), the CEEB College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), or other examinations.

Deferred admission: the practice of some colleges of allowing an accepted student to postpone enrollment for one year.

Early admission: admitting students of superior ability into college courses and programs before they have completed the standard high school program.

Family Financial Statement (FFS): a form used by The American College Testing Program to collect information about the student's total family income, assets, and expenses, and to analyze the family's potential contribution toward college expenses.

Financial Aid Form (FAF): a form used by the College Scholarship Service to collect information about the student's total family income, assets, and expenses, and to analyze the family's potential contribution toward college expenses.

Grade point average (GPA): an indicator of the student's overall scholastic performance. The GPA is computed by totaling the number of grade points earned in each course (generally, A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, F=0) and then dividing the sum by the total number of courses carried.

Honors program: any program offering opportunity for superior students to enrich their educational experience through independent, advanced, or accelerated study.

Independent study: an arrangement which allows the student to earn college credit through individual study usually planned with and supervised by a faculty advisor.

Major: the subject of study in which the student chooses to specialize; a series of related courses, taken primarily in the junior and senior years.

Open admissions: the policy of some colleges of admitting virtually all high school graduates, regardless of academic qualifications such as high school grades and admission test scores.

P-ACT+: a program for tenth graders designed to stimulate early thinking about postsecondary planning, assess status of academic preparation for college, support good high school course selection, and provide preparation for the ACT Assessment.

Pell Grant: financial assistance, awarded by the federal government on the basis of need, designed to provide the "floor" of an aid package for post-secondary education. The grant may be used toward tuition, room and board, books, or other educational costs, and requires no repayment.

Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT): a program designed to provide a practice test for juniors as a warm-up for the SAT.

Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC): Air Force, Army, and Navy programs on certain campuses which combine military education with baccalaureate degree study, often when financial support for those students who commit themselves to future service in the Armed Forces.

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT): test of verbal and mathematical abilities given by the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) at specified test centers throughout the year. Required or recommended by colleges as part of the admission process.

Transcript: official record of high school or college courses and grades generally required as part of the college application.

COLLEGE SUCCESS FACTORS

Test scores and high school grades are important

...However, they measure only part of your "potential"

