



How to Research Colleges

As you research colleges using print sources, on-line sources and in-person resources, be sure to capture the information in your Custom College Plan account. Those notes can include webpage and video links, as well as language you cut and paste from various sources. Keeping information organized and accessible will pay off as you narrow down your list and write “Why us?” essays later.

Questions to Keep in Mind

- What is exciting about the academic environment? Consider academic offerings/majors/special programs, courses and professors that interest you.
- How can you see yourself becoming involved and relating to others? Consider extra-curricular groups/clubs/teams/opportunities and the role of sports and Greek life on campus culture.
- What seems to be most important to this college? Often you can glean this information from the website. Is this emphasis a positive or negative element for you?
- What are three reasons you might like to attend this college?
- What are three reasons you might not like to attend this college?

Print Sources

- *The Fiske Guide* – complete and unbiased
- *The Best 380 Colleges*, by the Princeton Review. Look especially at professors’ “interesting” and “accessible” ratings
- *The Insider’s Guide to the Colleges*, by the Yale Daily News – more opinionated and a smaller range of colleges
- *Colleges That Change Lives*, by Loren Pope – focused on small liberal arts colleges. (See their website, CTCL.org, as well.)
- *The Hidden Ivies* by Howard Greene – extensive reviews of 50 top private colleges that include sections on “The Ideal Student” and “What Happens After College.” The statistics are dated now (2009) but the atmospheric descriptions are still fairly accurate.

On-Line Sources

- BigFuture.collegeboard.org – factual overview
- Collegexpress.com – multiple ways to find the type of school you may be looking for
- Google – search interesting phrases like “What students really think about Tulane” or “Grinnell students forum.”
- College websites – especially for student blogs, course catalogs, e-mail addresses of students to correspond with directly. Get a feel for how the college wants to come across.
- Student newspapers:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_student_newspapers_in_the_United_States



WILTSHIRE COLLEGE CONSULTING

- Unigo.com, Cappex.com, colleges.niche.com – provide reviews of colleges by current students and recent alumni. Take them with a grain of salt, but the large number of reviews boosts their reliability.
- Youniversity.com and Youvisit.com – virtual tours. Also try searching the college name and “virtual tour” for more options.
- CollegeClicktv.com – interviews with current college students

In-Person Resources

- Current students or recent alumni – Find a student through the admissions office, website, or your own contacts through social media. Ask for 15 minutes of their time and then discuss questions like: What was the most amazing class you took and why? What surprised you about this college once you got on campus? Would you choose to attend again? Why or why not? If I choose to go here, what is the most important thing I should know?
- College Fairs – To find a regional fair in your area, go to www.nacacnet.org and look in the Events/Training area. (Also see my handout, “How to Navigate a College Fair.”)
- Visits by college representatives to your high school. Have a few questions ready that reflect your specific interests. For instance: How easy is it for non-theatre majors to get a part in the play? How easy is it to double-major and what percentage of students do it? What are the two or three most popular extracurricular activities or clubs on campus? Be sure the answers to your questions aren’t readily available through Google.

Financial Aid Information

- Ask your parents to complete both the institutional and federal Estimated Family Contribution calculator found here: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/paying-your-share/expected-family-contribution-calculator>
- Net Price Calculators -- Each college must, by law, make an NPC available on their website. See how closely the net price compares with the EFC your parents calculated. Also be aware that many of these calculators are not very accurate. For instance, many times they don’t factor in merit scholarships.
- Try CollegeAbacus.com to compare colleges. The NPCs provided by the College Board are not always that accurate (see the fine print). College Abacus doesn’t have every school (many refuse to cooperate) but for those the site covers, the accuracy is very high.