

2

SESSION 2: THERE IS A COLLEGE FOR EVERYONE!

The purpose of this session is to help students understand that a vast array of college possibilities lie ahead for all students and that each student will be responsible for identifying his/her own college options. In this session, students will be encouraged to begin thinking about what they value and what they will look for in a college. Students will be exposed to some of the resources available for college research.

Objectives:

By the end of this session, students:

- understand that the college experience is very different from the middle or high school experience
- gain an understanding of different types of colleges and the different experiences and opportunities offered
- have been introduced to some of the resources available for getting to know about colleges
- begin to explore the kind(s) of colleges which might be a “fit”
- have been introduced to resources for researching college information.

Materials and Handouts:

All Activities: blackboard and chalk, dry-erase board and markers, or flipchart with markers

Recap Activity: Have students share their lists from their Session I homework assignment.

Activity #1: Evaluating Your School Experience to Date

Activity #2: Getting to Know College Possibilities

Handout: Charting Your Course for College—Part One

Activity #3: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About College but Were Afraid to Ask

Handout: Charting Your Course for College—Part Two

Handout: Doing Your Research

Several college guidebooks and college viewbooks

Activity #4: Using the Internet to Research Colleges

Handout: Internet Sites Focused on College Exploration

Access to computers, if possible. Alternatively, you may want to photocopy examples of web pages which students may access for free.

2

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ACTIVITY #1: EVALUATING YOUR SCHOOL EXPERIENCE TO DATE

Opening Discussion:

Remind students that they probably didn't have much choice when it came to selecting the schools that they are currently attending. Additionally, remind students that there may not have been a large number of options regarding their choice for high school. However, the sky's the limit when it comes to the choices students will have for college. This is the perfect time to begin thinking about all of the possibilities that exist!

Activity/Handouts:

None

Questions to open up discussion with students:

- How was it decided which high school you would attend?
- What have you liked about your current school?
- What would you change if you could?
- How well do you anticipate that your high school will help you reach your goals?
- If you could choose your high school now, what would you look for?

Instructions:

1. Ask students to brainstorm a list of qualities that they believe would make a school "just right" and list these qualities on blackboard or flip charts.
2. Have students discuss the qualities on the list and how these might apply to their college search.

2

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ACTIVITY # 2: GETTING TO KNOW COLLEGE POSSIBILITIES

Opening Discussion:

Colleges aren't all the same. Different colleges and universities have different missions (functions, goals). This activity is designed to teach students the different types of higher education opportunities that exist for them after high school.

Activity/Handout:

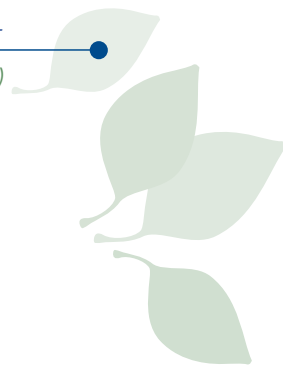
Charting Your Course for College—Part One

Instructions:

1. Give every student the handout, “Charting Your Course for College—Part One.” Allow students a few minutes to read the handout and then review the different types of colleges with the students.
2. Write, as headings, each category of college on the blackboard or flip chart pages.
3. Ask students to suggest names of colleges which they think fit into each category. Help them evaluate each suggested college accurately, and then write the name of the college under the correct heading on blackboard or flipcharts

AND/OR

4. Ask students to suggest people they know who have attended specific colleges. Evaluate which category of college that institution falls under. Write the name of the college under the correct heading on blackboard or flipcharts.



CHARTING YOUR COURSE FOR COLLEGE (PART ONE)³

“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler...
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”

—Robert Frost

Few decisions that you will make in your life will seem more important than your choice of a college. In fact, the career paths open to you, many of the friends you will maintain for a lifetime, even the area of the country in which you are likely to live and work will be strongly influenced by your college decision. It is important to remember that choosing a college—or even a list of colleges to which to apply—is not an exact science. There is not “one perfect” college for anyone. Instead, there are many colleges that would be a fine match for every college-bound student. The trick is to identify your unique priorities for selecting a college, carefully research the characteristics of a range of colleges and universities and, finally, make a match of several options to which you will make application.

GETTING STARTED

As you begin planning for college selection, take stock of your priorities. You will be sitting in the classroom at your final choice, not your parents and not your best friend. Although it is a good idea to seek advice, especially from teachers or counselors who know colleges well, in the end, no one can tell you where you’ll be satisfied and happy.

A good place to start is by considering what you have and have not found important and rewarding in your high school experience.

Ask questions like:

- How do I learn best? In large or lecture-style classes, or in small discussion/seminar settings?
- Do I prefer being one of the best in a class, or do I need the competition of equally bright peers in order to challenge myself?
- Do I learn more quickly when structure is clear and uniform, or does freedom to make choices about how I spend my time for a class fit me better?
- What extracurricular activities have been most important to me? Which will I want to continue in college?
- What have I learned about my academic interests and abilities that will influence what I may study in college?
- Who are my friends? Do I want my relationships in college to be similar or different?

Answers to these questions will help you apply what you have learned about yourself during your high school years as you set priorities for your college experience.

³ Copyright 2004: Mary Lee Hoganson

Before you begin picking college possibilities, it is also a good idea to have a candid conversation with your parents. Are there limits to what they can or will contribute to your college finances? (If your parents are separated or divorced, ask this question of both parents since many colleges will expect a financial contribution from both.) Are there colleges which they hope you will consider? Are they comfortable with allowing you to travel a great distance for college?

If you and your parents are on the same page—great! If not, it is better to negotiate differences of opinion at the beginning of the selection process rather than at the end, when you have selected a college which your parents will not support as a final choice. If you find your parents too narrowly focused, your counselor may be able to educate them about the wide range of quality colleges. If they are worried about paying for college, your counselors can help them understand the financial aid process.

CONSIDERING COLLEGE TYPES:

Colleges aren't all the same. Different colleges and universities have different missions (or functions, or goals). While no two are exactly alike, most fit into one or more of the following categories:

Liberal Arts Colleges focus on the education of undergraduate students. Classes are generally taught by professors who see teaching as their primary responsibility. Because most liberal arts colleges are smaller than universities, classes tend to be smaller and more personal attention is available. As opposed to preparation for a specific career path, students who attend liberal arts colleges are exposed to a broad base of courses in the humanities, social sciences and sciences. In addition, they select at least one area of in-depth study which is their college “major.” Many employers look for graduates of liberal arts programs, valuing their well-rounded preparation.

Universities are generally larger and include a liberal arts college, as well as some professionally-oriented colleges and graduate programs. Universities offer a greater range of academic choices than do liberal arts colleges. They will likely provide more extensive resources in terms of library, laboratory, fine arts and athletic facilities. At many large universities class size will reflect institutional size, with most introductory classes being taught in a lecture format.

Technical Institutes and Professional Schools enroll students who have made clear decisions about what they want to study and emphasize preparation for specific careers, for example in music or fine arts, engineering or technical sciences. You will want to be quite sure of your future direction before selecting one of these options.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities find their origins in the time when African-American students were systematically denied access to most other colleges and universities. Students at HBCUs have a unique opportunity to experience an educational community in which they are a part of the majority. They find committed faculty mentors who encourage their expectations of success.

Similarly, **Women's Colleges**, with their larger numbers of female faculty and administrators, offer college women confidence-building role models, greater opportunities to serve in a full range of student leadership positions, and a heightened awareness of career possibilities for women.

Community or junior colleges generally offer the first two years of a liberal arts education, in addition to specialized occupational preparation. An associate degree is awarded at the end of a two-year program of studies, following which many students continue their education at a four-year institution.

Proprietary institutions are considered for-profit companies that operate under the demands of investors and stockholders. They attract adult learners and part-time students in search of narrowly-focused professional training opportunities. These programs usually offer a non-traditional format; many for-profits also have classes solely available online.

ACTIVITY # 3: EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT COLLEGE BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

Opening Discussion:

In this activity students are encouraged to investigate the many characteristics of colleges and universities that should be considered as they explore options and what constitutes an appropriate match or “good fit.” In addition, students are introduced to reliable resources for college research.

Activity/Handout:

Charting Your Course for College—Part Two

Doing Your Research

Several college guidebooks and college viewbooks

Instructions:

1. Give every student the handout entitled “Charting Your Course for College—Part Two.”
2. Ask students to brainstorm a list of everything they would want to know about a college before deciding to apply. (For example: Is it in a city or the country? What majors are offered? Does the college have fraternities and sororities?) List these suggestions on a clean blackboard or fresh flipchart pages. Keep prompting until a relatively long list is created. Prompts might include questions like:
 - a. What about a location might make a difference to you?
 - b. What about where you will live at college?
 - c. What kinds of facilities might you want on a campus?
 - d. What will you want to do to have fun?
3. After the list is completed and all responses have been recorded, ask each student to consider and pick the three to five questions that are the most important to him/her. Make a checkmark next to each question picked.
4. Circle the top vote getters.
5. Ask students where they think they could find information about each topic/quality circled.
6. Introduce students to several good college guidebooks and a sampling of college viewbooks.
7. Divide students into small groups. Give each group at least one guidebook and several college viewbooks. Ask each group to develop a list of information/answers to questions that they were able to locate.
8. Have each group report on what was located.
9. To conclude this activity, distribute handout “Doing Your Research” to be read at home.

CHARTING YOUR COURSE FOR COLLEGE (PART TWO)⁴

Here are some other important things to consider in selecting colleges:

ACCREDITATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE FEDERAL STUDENT AID PROGRAMS: The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by colleges and universities meets acceptable levels of quality. Accrediting agencies, which are private educational associations of regional or national scope, develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met. To participate in the federal student aid programs, an institution must be accredited by an accrediting agency or state approval agency recognized by the US Secretary of Education as a “reliable authority as to the quality of postsecondary education” within the meaning of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended. This is all very technical, but the bottom line is if a college or university is unaccredited, it will not be able to offer federal student aid. You should be very cautious about considering a school that does not participate in the federal student aid programs.

INSTITUTION SIZE: The size of a college or university will have an impact upon many of your opportunities and experiences. The range of academic majors offered, the extracurricular possibilities, the amount of personal attention you’ll receive, the number of books in the library, will all be influenced by size.

In considering size, however, it is essential that you look beyond the raw number of students attending. Consider instead, average class size for both first year students and upperclassmen. Investigate not just the number of faculty, but also how accessible faculty are to students. Perhaps you are considering a small department within a large school, or vice versa. Large schools may offer extensive support services for students with special needs or those experiencing difficulty. Smaller schools may not be able to fund similar programs. On the other hand, extra support may not be necessary if faculty work closely with individual students.

LOCATION: Distance from home may be important to you. Is it important to you to be able to visit home frequently or do you see this as a time to experience a new part of the country? Some of you will prefer an urban environment with access to museums, ethnic food or major league ball games. Others will hope for easy access to outdoor activities or the serenity and safety of a more rural setting.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS: If you have a good idea of something specific you want to study in college or a career for which you want to prepare, look for well-respected academic departments in this discipline at the colleges you explore. Talk with professors and students in these departments. Research relative reputation by surveying adults already in the field and using printed resources which rank academic departments.

You should not limit your selection process to academic program issues alone. Studies show that a majority of college students change college major at least once during their college years. Therefore, it is important to pick a college or university that will offer you many appealing possibilities. Look for unique options such as study abroad, unusual academic calendars, or cooperative education plans which enable you to include several paid internships with your classwork, as ways of enhancing your education.

If you are undecided, relax and pick an academically-balanced institution which offers a range of majors and programs. Most colleges offer expert counseling to help the undecided student find a focus.



CAMPUS LIFE: Be sure that you consider what your experience will be like at a college beyond the classroom. In order to grow in all ways, you will want a reasonable balance between academic rigor and an active social life. Find out what is available in terms of extracurricular activities, athletics, and special interest groups. Does the community surrounding the college offer attractive outlets for students? Are students truly welcomed by the community? Is there an ethnic or religious community in which you can participate? What influence, do fraternities and sororities have on campus life?

Colleges will often require that you live in campus housing for one or more years. So, in considering social life, be sure to look carefully at the quality of life in the dormitories. Many colleges now offer residential-life options, such as substance-free dorms and special interest floors for students who share academic, recreational or community service interests. Others will offer dormitory-based study assistance, computer facilities, and counseling services. Ask if housing is guaranteed to be available to returning students. If so, how are dormitory assignments made after the first year?

COST: Today's price-tag for a college education has made cost an important consideration for most students. At the same time, virtually all colleges work very hard to ensure that academically-qualified students from every economic circumstance can find the financial aid that will allow them to attend. In considering cost, look beyond the price-tag to financial assistance that may be available. Decide the value of a desired educational experience and how much sacrifice (usually in terms of work and loan) you are willing to make to obtain your goals. Work closely with the financial aid officers at the colleges to which you apply.

Two factors that are less obvious to many students, but very important in predicting the kind of experience you will have in college are:

DIVERSITY: You will learn much from your college classmates every day—in the classroom and in activities. Many graduates tell us that this was an important consideration in their college choice. Consider geographic, ethnic, racial and religious diversity of the student body as ways of assessing your future learning opportunities.

RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES: One of the best ways to measure the quality of a college or university and the satisfaction of its students is by learning the percentage of students who return after the first year and the percentage of entering students who remain to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates are indicators that:

- A college and a majority of its students are well-matched
- Sufficient classes and academic programs are available
- Responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.



DOING YOUR RESEARCH

Today, there are so many resources available to students looking at colleges that it is hard to know where to start. If you are determined to do a thorough job of researching colleges you will want to use several of the following resources:

COLLEGE GUIDEBOOKS: Students often begin with one or two of the many college guides. Excellent and objective resources include *The College Handbook*, published by the College Board, and *Peterson's Guide to Four Year Colleges*, to name only two of the better known. These comprehensive references contain all of the data needed to answer most of your factual questions. Guides which address, in addition, quality of life issues and are based on surveys of enrolled students, offer subjective information. These include *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* and *The Insider's Guide* that is published by the Yale Daily News. If you want to get specific information about college majors, the College Board's *Index of College Majors* is a good starting place. Ratings of specific academic programs, though also subjective in nature, can be found in resources such as *Rugg's Recommendations on the Colleges*. Most public and many school libraries keep copies of these guidebooks on shelves.

Beware of rankings that appear to make sweeping comparisons of the quality of entire institutions. You should know that these rankings are often based on data reported by the colleges themselves, the accuracy of which has recently been questioned. Such rankings often weigh factors, like acceptance rate of applicants or average faculty salaries, which have little demonstrable relationship to the quality of an undergraduate's education. Remember that all colleges have academic programs of varying strength.

COLLEGE-PRODUCED RESOURCES: Colleges will shower you with publications once you show any interest. Glossy viewbooks give a brief glimpse of campus, majors, student life, and the admission process. Don't ignore the college's website as a source of information. It is the definitive place to:

- look for application deadlines and requirements
- see the breadth and depth of classes offered in your areas of interest
- find a comprehensive list of scholarships offered
- discover the academic credentials of faculty members
- graduation requirements.

COMPUTER RESOURCES: The computer has had a significant impact on the type and availability of new college resources. In the past few years there has been a proliferation of computer software tailored to the college search process. Check to see if your school counseling office has available a college-search program to assist you in your college planning.



PEOPLE RESOURCES: Your school counselor will help you assess your qualifications for a range of postsecondary options and share the experiences of students from your school who have attended various institutions.

Plan to meet with college admission officers if they visit your school in the spring and fall. Be prepared with questions that go beyond information you can look up on the Internet. Ask about student satisfaction, retention, campus safety, support services, etc. Feel free to follow up with letters or phone calls to this admission person.

Alumni of your school, who are attending or have graduated from colleges that you are considering, will be an excellent source of information. Because they are likely to have entered college with a background similar to yours, their experiences are particularly meaningful.

Talk to people who are working in careers to which you aspire. Ask for their recommendations about college programs and preparation paths. Many professional associations provide resources to students preparing for specific vocations.

COLLEGE FAIRS AND OPEN HOUSES: Watch the bulletin boards at your school for announcements of area-wide college fairs or open houses hosted on college campuses. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) holds large college fairs in many large cities throughout the country. In addition to the general fairs, NACAC hosts college fairs specifically for students interested in visual and performing arts. You may find information about the dates and locations of NACAC fairs at www.nationalcollegefairs.org. At a fair you will have an opportunity to meet and talk with representatives from many colleges and universities, ask questions which are specific to your search, and get on mailing lists for applications.

VISITS TO COLLEGE CAMPUSES: The very best way to gain first-hand knowledge of a college or university is to visit. At a minimum, make some visits to colleges and universities in your local area, which vary in size and kind. This will give you a baseline for judging the kind of environment you are seeking. It is very important that you visit the college you think you will attend, before making a final commitment. Arrange through the admission office to attend classes and stay in a residence hall, if possible.



2

SESSION 2: THERE IS A COLLEGE FOR EVERYONE!

ACTIVITY # 4: USING THE INTERNET TO RESEARCH COLLEGES

Opening Discussion:

As early and as often as possible, students should make use of internet tools in researching:

- specific colleges
- the college admission process
- financial aid and scholarships

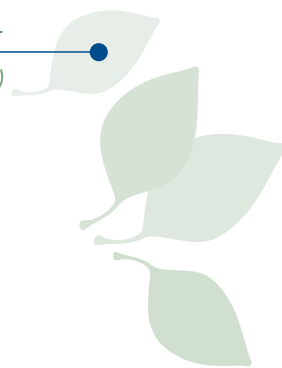
Activity/Handout:

Internet Sites Focused on College Exploration

You will want access to computers, if possible. Alternatively, you may want to photocopy examples of web pages, which students may access for free.

Instructions:

1. Distribute handout listing good, free websites for exploring colleges.
2. Explain the difference between free websites and those which charge fees for use.
3. If a computer with a projector is available, walk students through one of the websites. Alternatively, use photocopied web pages to talk about the kinds of information available on exploration websites.
4. Encourage students to use computers at school, the library and home to begin researching colleges and college matches.
5. If computers are available, allow students to begin exploring. Circulate to be of assistance throughout this activity.



INTERNET SITES FOCUSED ON COLLEGE EXPLORATION:

COLLEGE INFORMATION

CSO College Center: www.imfirst.org

The College Board: www.collegeboard.com

KnowHow2Go: www.knowhow2go.org

Hobson's CollegeView: www.collegeview.com

Peterson's: www.petersons.com

The Common Application Online: www.commonapp.org

Colleges That Change Lives: www.ctcl.org

Colleges Navigator: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>

Undocumented Students: www.nacacnet.org/issues-action/LegislativeNews/Pages/Undocumented.aspx

Universal College Application: www.universalcollegeapp.com

FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION

Federal Student Aid: <http://studentaid.ed.gov>

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):
www.fafsa.gov

FAFSA4caster: www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov

Colleges Score Card: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>

CSS/PROFILE: <https://profileonline.collegeboard.com>

The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid: www.finaid.org

FastWeb: www.fastweb.com

FindTuition: www.findtuition.com

Sallie Mae: www.salliemae.com

TESTING

ACT: www.act.org

ACT Fee Waiver Instructions: www.actstudent.org/faq/feewaiver.html

SAT: The College Board: www.collegeboard.org

SAT Fee Waiver Instructions: www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees/feewaivers.html

Preliminary SAT (PSAT): www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/psat/about.html

Free Test Prep from Number2.com: www.number2.com

The Princeton Review: www.princetonreview.com

Kaplan's Test Prep: www.kaptest.com

ASSOCIATIONS/ORGANIZATIONS AND RESEARCH/POLICY

National Association for College Admission Counseling: www.nacacnet.org

MemberPortal/United Negro College Fund (UNCF): www.uncf.org

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities: www.hacu.net/hacu/Default_EN.asp

National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education: www.nafeo.org

First In The Family: www.firstinthefamily.org

ATHLETICS

The Official NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse: <http://eligibilitycenter.org>

Athletic Aid: www.athleticaid.com

National Association of Interscholastic Athletics: <https://naia.org>

CAREERS

The Occupational Outlook Handbook: www.bls.gov/ooh

2

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WRAP-UP

Keep in Mind:

No two schools are exactly alike. Students need to know that each college presents a different opportunity and a new way to grow. Because colleges can differ vastly, students should be strongly encouraged to do their research of a variety of schools, and they should be aware that there are a multitude of resources designed to help them do so.

Homework:

1. Instruct students to read the “Doing Your Research” handout prior to the next session.
2. Upon reading “Doing Your Research,” students should pick one or two of the resources mentioned on the handout to find out more information about one college that currently interests them. Public and school libraries are a good place to access computers and/or college guidebooks and college viewbooks.
3. They should then record three pieces of interesting information about the college in their notebook and be prepared to discuss their findings with the group.

