

## Final Decision: College Choice

You've already narrowed your college choices. Here are some tips to help you make a final decision.

### Obvious and Not-So-Obvious Questions

*College Cost: Obvious...*

**What different financial aid packages does the school offer?** Remember to factor in costs such as transportation home, long distance calls, etc.

**How much does housing cost?** Is finding off-campus housing difficult?

*And not so obvious...*

**What is my actual cost?** Other expenses beyond just the "sticker price" for tuition can include:

- Lab fees
- Fee to add/drop a course
- Transportation home
- Computer/Internet fees
- Car expenses (gas, parking, insurance, etc.)
- Application and doc fees
- Security deposit

**What is the average increase in tuition and other costs from year to year?** View at least three years' worth of data to chart past increases.

*Academics/Career Help: Obvious...*

**Does your college offer the program you want?** Do required courses fill up quickly? How many students graduate in four years? What's the reputation of the program you desire?

**What is the quality of academic resources?** Are the library, equipment, computer labs, etc. up-to-date? Accessible?

**What kind of career planning services are available?** How many graduates find jobs in their field of study? Does the school offer your preferred level of career development skills?

*And not so obvious...*

**How easy is it to switch majors?** Will it mean spending more time in school? What other majors are available?

**What percentage of students graduate in four years?** Ask for an explanation if the on-time graduation rate is low. Is it difficult to get into required classes?

*Campus Life: Obvious...*

**What student organizations are on campus?** Are they ones you would want to join?

**What meal options are available?** What is served in the cafeteria? Does it cater to specific allergies? What's available when the cafeteria is closed?

*And not so obvious...*

**What is the retention rate?** How many students come back after their freshman year?

**Do you need a car?** What jobs are close to campus? Would you need to drive to any classes?

### Take a Tour of Your Favorite College...

*On campus...*

- **Schedule an appointment.** Be ready with multiple dates and times. Avoid major events or holidays. Arrange to speak to other students, professors, financial aid, admissions and career offices. Ask about a guided tour.
- **Pack smart.** You may want to pack more casual clothes for when you walk around campus, and something more formal for an interview with the admissions office.
- **Take notes as you visit.** If you visit several colleges (especially in one day), the details can get blurry.
- **Go to a class.** Note class size, instructors, difficulty level.
- **View other campus buildings.** Check out residence hall rooms, cafeterias, computer labs, health and recreational facilities, the library, etc.

*...Or off campus*

- **Research online.** Check out the college's website. Is there a virtual tour that you can take online?
- **Communicate with the college directly.** Call or e-mail the admissions and financial aid offices. Some colleges offer chatrooms. Write down the name of the person with whom you spoke.
- **College fairs.** Let colleges come to you. Ask your counselor about upcoming fairs and prepare some questions to ask the college's representative.
- **Use your personal network.** Talk to counselors, family members, siblings and friends to find someone who attended your prospective college. Ask about their experiences and impressions.

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\$3 billion in scholarships  
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#### **FastTip! Safety on Campus:**

Is your prospective college safe? Ask if your school has emergency call boxes, campus escorts, shuttle services and ID checks. Is the campus well-lit at night? Does campus housing prevent intruders?