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SESSION 5: THE COLLEGE SEARCH AND APPLICATION PROCESS

ACTIVITY # 3: LEARNING THROUGH CAMPUS VISITS AND COLLEGE FAIRS

Opening Discussion:

Students should know that colleges welcome prospective students to their campuses, and campus visits are a wonderful way for students to get to know colleges. Students should also know that a number of colleges have cost-free visit programs. Colleges often identify potential applicants through school counselors. Students should talk with their school counselors about these programs and should also contact colleges directly to find out whether they have programs for prospective applicants.

Colleges visit communities across the country and take part in college fairs to share information with prospective students. It's not only important to attend these college fairs, but to be prepared.

Part 1: Preparing for the College Visit

Activity/Handout:

Campus Visits

Part 2: Accessing Colleges Through School Fairs

Activity/Handout:

College Fair Tip Sheet

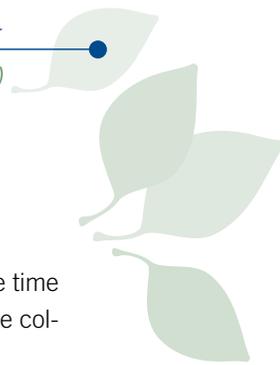
Instructions:

Part 1:

1. Distribute the "Campus Visits" handout.
2. Discuss briefly and answer questions from students.
3. Ask students to keep the handout in their folder for future reference.

Part 2:

1. Distribute the "College Fair Tip Sheet" handout. Go over the handout with the students.
2. Access a list of college fairs in the area through the NACAC or the regional affiliate website.
3. Instruct students to prepare by developing a list of the college booths they want to visit prior to going to the fair. They should research the colleges and use their college tracking charts to help them decide which booths to visit and what questions to ask.
4. Optional: If time allows, set up a scenario where two students approaching a college table at a fair; the one with a list of questions and the second unprepared. Role-play the two scenarios.



CAMPUS VISITS

After you compile a list of colleges where you may apply, it's time for the campus visit. While it does take time and money, the campus visit is invaluable in information gathering. It allows you and your family to gauge college "fit."

The visit can give you a true sense of day-to-day life on campus:

- The school may be diverse, but is there a genuine integration of the student body?
- The school may be large, but is it supportive?
- Teachers can be highly qualified, but are they enthusiastic about teaching?

Understanding a college requires looking beneath the facts and figures.

Pre-Planning

Call to schedule the visit at least two weeks ahead of time.

Not pre-planning can lead to an unproductive visit. If you call ahead of time, the admission office will be able to accommodate you and ensure you have a great visit.

Make sure to get proper directions to the admission office.

To make a good first impression, make sure you know where you're going so that you can arrive on time. Get a campus map and, if you have any questions, call the admission office to clarify your directions.

If there is anything specific you wish to see, ask ahead of time.

Depending upon the time of year, admission offices may not be able to accommodate you. For example, in the summer months staying overnight or seeing a professor usually does not happen. However, it does not hurt to ask if there might be something of specific interest to you, like visiting a class.

Be flexible.

Be willing to try something else, and always remember that you want to present yourself positively—you might want to apply to this school later.

If you need to cancel or reschedule, call ASAP.

Of course, you cannot predict emergencies or unforeseen circumstances but it is a common courtesy to contact the admission office to let them know that you can't come.

During the Visit

Take notes

Write a few things down during the visit. Your notes will be a valuable reference when comparing colleges later.

- What image do you get of student life? Talking to current students is a good way to find out what life might be like for you on campus. What activities are students participating in on campus? Do students appear happy with their experience?
- What are the admission criteria? Admission criteria vary by college. It is important to find out what you need to do to be eligible for a specific school. Ask what courses and tests need to be taken before you apply.

- What events and speakers are planned? Events and campus guests are another lens through which to evaluate and judge the soul of the college. Are they engaging?

Ask questions

Take an active role. This is a golden opportunity for you to ask questions about what really matters to you.

- Are answers to your questions consistent? You can determine a lot about whether a college has a certain culture if you receive consistent answers to your questions whether you are asking them of students, admission personnel, teaching faculty, or administrators. What do people care about? How do students and faculty treat and regard one another?
- Are people asking questions of you? When you meet people during your visit, you can find out a lot by the questions they ask you. Are they asking you questions that lead you to believe they are interested in you and the contributions you will make?

Try to do some extra things on your own.

Eat in the cafeteria, talk to students, see where they hang out and look around the neighborhood of the school. If you look around, you can get a more complete picture and not just what the admission office highlights.

- What is posted on campus bulletin boards? Posters, message, and announcements about upcoming events all give you an impression about the soul of the college. They inform you what people care about. What are the issues? Who is recruiting for volunteers? Who is speaking out about what?
- What are students doing or talking about when they are not in class? As you walk across the campus, get near students speaking to one another. What are they talking about? A campus issue? What just happened in class? Or, about that afternoon's sporting event? When you are eating with students in the dining hall, what are their topics of conversation?

Don't discount the school because of bad weather or other uncontrollable circumstances.

Some students cross a school off their list simply because it rained, or because they visited during a school break when activities are minimal. Don't fall into this trap.

Post Visit

Always write a thank you note or email the admission contact.

To make a great impression, write a thank you note to those you met on campus. This gives you the opportunity to be remembered when your application is reviewed.

Make sure you have contact information for any future questions or concerns.

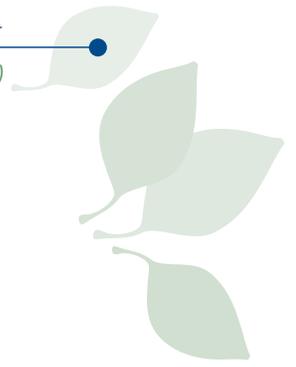
Keep business cards and pamphlets in some organized folder so that you can refer back to them if necessary.

Make sure to remain in contact with the school.

Some schools keep a record of contact information, and in some cases, use that as a measurement of your interest level as the school is considering you for admission. This process is known as demonstrated interest.

Talk with your high school counselor about the visit.

Parents, relatives and friends can help you evaluate your impressions after college visits, but your counselor can provide a neutral and informative perspective about your experiences.



COLLEGE FAIR TIP SHEET

BEFORE THE FAIR

- Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Do I want to attend an extra-large, large, medium or small school?
 - What major do I wish to study?
 - Do I want to attend an urban, suburban or rural school?
 - Do I want to attend a two-year, four-year, single sex or religiously affiliated school?
 - Do I want to participate in athletics, clubs, fraternities or sororities, or special programs, such as study abroad or cooperative education?
- Research colleges that are attending the fair to determine if they meet your search criteria.
- Make a list of questions to ask college representatives. Try to select questions that are insightful and are not easily answered in the literature.
- Bring a résumé and/or card with your name, address, high school, year of graduation, email address, intended major and activities to give to the representative.

AT THE FAIR

- Pick up a fair directory and bag for all of the material you collect.
- Visit schools that match or are the closest match to your search criteria.
- Ask the same questions you have developed to each college representative you visit.
- Make sure to fill out an inquiry card to let the college know you were in attendance (or give them a pre-printed card you brought with you). This will enable you to get on their mailing list.
- Make notes about information which you found most interesting/helpful.
- Be adventurous. Don't just talk to the "well known" schools.
- Attend an information session that is offered to gather information about the college search process, financial aid or whatever topics are available.

AFTER THE FAIR

- Review information (catalogs and viewbooks) to gather more information and help narrow down your choices.
- Send a thank you note/email to the college representative as a way to reinforce your interest in the school.