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SESSION 5: THE COLLEGE SEARCH AND APPLICATION PROCESS

The purpose of this session is to build on the knowledge students have gained about themselves and colleges in the previous sessions and to expand upon the information from Session II about the various ways they can find out about colleges and begin to understand which colleges might be the best “match” for them. The students will look at their résumés in relation to the kinds of information they are gathering about colleges and, by looking at The Common Application, will begin to determine how they will ultimately convey this information to colleges. This session will also discuss how special needs and talents factor into the application process.

Objectives:

By the end of this session, students:

- understand the importance of “matching” their interests, abilities and goals with the resources individual colleges can offer
- be familiar with several resources that will help with a college search, including a discussion of the college visit
- be introduced to the application process
- understand how special needs and talents are viewed by colleges (this will include artistic, musical, and athletic talents, as well as the needs of students with learning disabilities)

Activities and Handouts:

Recap Activity: If students would like to share what qualities they would look for in the “Ideal Student” allow five or fewer minutes for them to read and discuss.

PART ONE: Continuing the college search

Activity #1: Beginning the search in earnest

Handouts: Activities Résumé (from Session IV); College Counseling Questionnaire

Activity #2: Using college viewbooks to track your interest

Handouts: College Match Tracking Chart; College Viewbooks; Internet Sites Focused on College Exploration (from Session II)

Activity #3: Learning through campus visits and college fairs

Handouts: Campus Visits; College Fair Tip Sheet

PART TWO: College Admission and the Application

Activity #4: Filling out an application

Handouts: Parts of a College Application

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PART ONE: CONTINUING THE COLLEGE SEARCH

ACTIVITY # 1:

BEGINNING THE SEARCH

Opening Discussion:

In Session II, “There is a College for Everybody,” students learned that there are more than 3,000 colleges and universities and there is more than one institution that can meet their needs. Building upon the questions discussed in “Charting Your Course for College,” students begin to personalize the search process, first by determining the questions to ask about what colleges can offer and, second, what they can convey to colleges through the application process.

Activity/Handout:

Activities Résumé (from Session IV)
College Counseling Questionnaire

Instructions:

1. Remind the students they are at the center of the search, so they need to make their own decisions and realize that the answers to questions are different for each student.
2. Hand out the “College Counseling Questionnaire” and ask them to complete it as honestly and fully as possible.
3. Then ask them to highlight the factors they think will be most important to them as they look for the “right match” college.

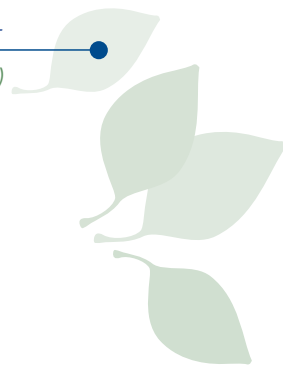
COLLEGE COUNSELING QUESTIONNAIRE

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____ GPA: _____

In the space below, respond to the following questions. Your responses are for your personal information and college counseling only. Respond openly and honestly.

Location:

1. Do you have a specific location in mind for college (i.e., a specific city, state or region)?
2. Do you have any requirements in terms of location (i.e., warm/cold climate, near family, near the ski slopes)?
3. How far from/close to home is the ideal college (i.e., minutes away, an hour away, a day's drive, a plane flight)?
4. Do you prefer a city, a suburb or a small town?
5. Do you want your college to be near other colleges (in a college town)?
6. Do your parents have a certain location in mind?
7. Are you willing to consider locations you have not yet visited or do you prefer a location with which you are comfortable?



Academic Interests:

1. Do you have a specific career in mind? What college major do you think would best suit this profession?
2. What other academic areas do you hope to pursue in college?
3. Do you work better when you are challenged by tough classes and motivated classmates or when you are near the top of a less competitive group?
4. How hard do you work in high school?
5. How hard do you expect to work in college?
6. What types of academic programs would your like you ideal college to have (study abroad, internships, co-op, honors, etc.)?
7. Is it important that you attend a well-known college? Why?

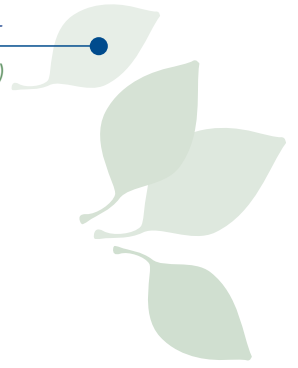
Adapted from Cabral, Joshua. "Addressing the Needs of First-Generation, College-Bound Students: A Comprehensive 5th–12th Grade Approach." *South Boston Harbor Academy Charter School*. 2004



Size and Student Body:

1. Do you prefer a small college (2,000 students or less), a mid-sized college (2,000–8,000), or a large university (more than 8,000 students)? Why?
2. Are you comfortable in small classes? Large classes? Why?
3. Do you prefer a college that is primarily for undergraduates or a college that has lots of graduate and doctoral students on campus?
4. Would you consider a single-sex college?
5. Do you prefer a college with a religious affiliation?
6. Is racial/ethnic diversity important to you?

Adapted from Cabral, Joshua. "Addressing the Needs of First-Generation, College-Bound Students: A Comprehensive 5th–12th Grade Approach." *South Boston Harbor Academy Charter School*. 2004



Activities:

1. Do you plan to participate in sports at college?

2. What other extracurricular activities interest you?

Finances:

Will cost influence where you go to college? Will your family apply for financial aid? Do you think that you will qualify for merit scholarships (based on achievement)?

Admission Selectivity:

If 5 is the most selective (level of difficulty on gaining admission) and 1 is not at all selective, to which level of college do you expect to apply? Which do you think are likely to say yes?

Adapted from Cabral, Joshua. "Addressing the Needs of First-Generation, College-Bound Students: A Comprehensive 5th–12th Grade Approach." *South Boston Harbor Academy Charter School*. 2004

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ACTIVITY # 2: USING COLLEGE VIEWBOOKS TO TRACK YOUR INTEREST

Opening Discussion:

Remind the students about using guidebooks, viewbooks and the Internet to gather information about colleges. Encourage them to begin taking notes on which colleges appeal to them and why.

Activity/Handout:

College Match Tracking Chart

College Viewbooks

Internet Sites Focused on College Exploration (from Session II)

Instructions:

1. Distribute the “College Match Tracking Chart” and review the descriptive categories.
2. If students know which colleges interest them, have them complete the chart using what they already know about those schools. If not, distribute college viewbooks—you may need to divide students into small groups depending on the number of viewbooks you have available—and have them fill in the chart with information they find in the viewbooks. Ask the students if any of these colleges match their interests.
3. Encourage students to design their own charts, reflecting the factors most important to them.
4. Remind students to keep this chart and to use it in the future as they continue their college search. This chart is a good way for students and counselors to keep track of the colleges that the students have investigated.



COLLEGE MATCH TRACKING CHART

Place the name of the colleges that you are interested in at the top of each column. Add any factors that are important to you as you search for the best “match” for you.

	College A	College B	College C
School Name			
Location			
How Competitive?			
Majors Offered			
Extracurricular Activity			
Total Student Population			
Size of Classes			
Tuition/Scholarship Programs			
Academic Support Programs			
Dorm Choices			
Social Life			

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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

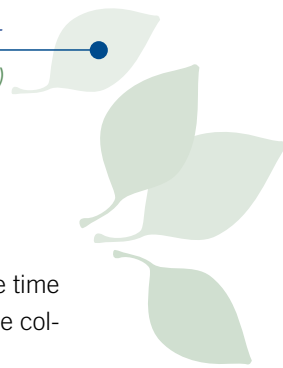
Instructions:

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.

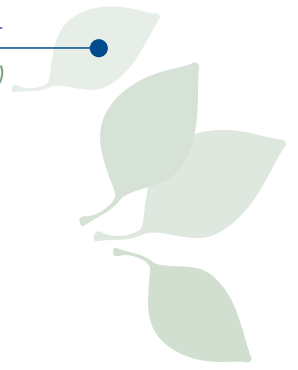
Keep business cards and pamphlets in some organized folder so that you can refer back to them if necessary.

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.

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PART TWO: COLLEGE ADMISSION AND THE APPLICATION

ACTIVITY #4: FILLING OUT AN APPLICATION

Opening discussion:

Begin a discussion on the application process with an interactive question and answer session. Here are some questions and themes to consider:

- How difficult do you think it is to be admitted to college?
- Did you know that some colleges practice “Open Admission,” while others are considered to be highly-selective? Some colleges only consider SAT scores and GPA while most will look at many other factors before making a decision. (Remember the “Great Sorting Game?”)
- Referring back the viewbooks and other colleges that have been discussed, see if you can determine schools that are “selective” in their admission policies.
- How do you think those colleges would view you as an applicant, considering your résumés and curriculum plans (courses taken, GPA, activities)? Let the students know that typically students will apply to several colleges and will try to include at least one “realistic” college that they and their school counselor think they could get into.
- Are you thinking about playing a sport in college? Playing a musical instrument? Majoring in painting or theatre? If so, you should know the following:

- **For the athlete:**

- Talk to your coaches early and often.
- Don’t be lured into college athletic search companies.
- Be open to all options: Division I, Division II, Division III; NAIA; Club and Intramural Teams.
- Keep your grades up because colleges are looking for student-athletes, not just athletes.
- If possible, go to the NCAA website (www.ncaa.org) to learn about eligibility and recruiting rules for all sports. Two other good websites are: www.CampusChamps.org and www.athleticaid.com.

- **For the artists, musicians and actors:**

- Discuss your plans with your teachers/instructors.
- Keep your work: portfolios for artists, lists of parts in plays for actors and, when possible, recordings of your music for musicians.
- Auditions for musicians and actors are often part of the admission process for those planning to continue to study their art.

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CONTINUED ACTIVITY #4: FILLING OUT AN APPLICATION

Activity/Handout:

Parts of a College Application

Instructions:

1. Give each student a copy of “Parts of a College Application.”
2. “Walk” the students through the parts of the application using the handout and sample application. There will not be time for them to complete the whole application at this time, but respond to any questions they have so they could do that when they get home. Emphasize that it is valuable to draft applications before they submit a “real” one. Here are the sections to focus on:
 - Activities section: Point out that when they completed the “Activities Résumé” in Session IV; the students compiled most of the information they will need for this section. What they will need to do is put that information in the format required by each individual application (often they are asked to list activities in order of importance). Give them time to begin doing that.
 - Secondary School Report Form: Explain that this is the type of form that someone at their high school, probably their counselor, will complete. For colleges that request it, it accompanies the transcript. Ask students what surprises them about this form. Ask them about their relationship with their counselor.
 - Mid-Year Report Form: Explain that this is sent after the fall semester of senior year. Explain to students that changes in their senior year curriculum have to be reported to colleges. SENIOR YEAR MATTERS!
 - Teacher Evaluation Form: Ask students what surprises them about this form. Stress that the purpose of the teacher recommendation is to write about them as a student in that teacher’s classroom. Ask students to identify at least two teachers who they could ask to write a recommendation and ask them to jot down several adjectives they think those teachers would use when describing them. Stress that if they can’t think of any teachers now, they should try to build a relationship with a teacher before senior year.
3. Conclude the session with a reminder that by beginning the college search early and by knowing the components of an application, the students are much better prepared to apply to college when the time comes in their senior year. Encourage them to keep all of the materials/handouts in a folder or binder.



PARTS OF A COLLEGE APPLICATION

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- You, the student, are responsible for sending your actual application and some additional documentation. Your high school is responsible for sending the transcript and a secondary school report (if required). If a teacher agrees to write a letter of recommendation, that teacher is responsible for submitting it. BUT you, the student, are responsible for following your school's policy for requesting transcripts and letters of recommendations. Know what you are expected to do!
- Listed below is everything that *could* be required, but you might not be asked to submit everything on this list to every college. *For example, there are many colleges that do not require students to write essays. There also are many colleges that do not require standardized test scores.*

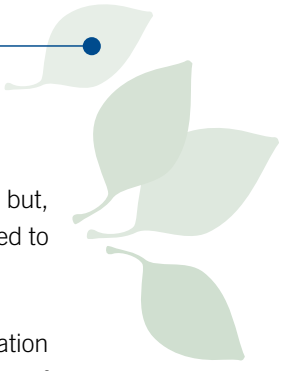
WHAT IS INCLUDED IN A COLLEGE APPLICATION?

A. Official Transcript: Your transcript is the record of all the courses you have taken for high school credit, your grades, and credits earned. This is the information you should have on the curriculum planner you completed in Session III. Other information that might be included on a transcript: GPA, class rank, standardized test scores, courses in progress. This is normally sent directly from your high school to the college.

B. Standardized Test Scores

C. The Application Form: The student is responsible for requesting an application form, completing it, and submitting it by the college deadline (by mail or online). Many colleges accept standardized college applications, such as The Common Application or The Universal Application. No matter what school or what application, these are important components:

- Personal and Educational Data (i.e., name, address, phone number, email, citizenship and residency information, high schools you have attended, college credits you have earned, parental information, senior year schedule, standardized test scores)
- Honors and Awards
- Extracurricular, Personal, and Volunteer Activities
- Employment, Internships, and Summer Activities (some colleges allow you to submit a résumé in addition to the activity section of their application)
- Essays, both short answer and a longer personal essay
- Disciplinary information
- Application Fee (many colleges will accept fee waivers which can be obtained from the guidance office)
- Signature
- For certain majors, students may be required to audition or asked to submit a portfolio of artistic work.



D. Secondary School Report Form or Counselor Recommendation Form: This is not required by all colleges but, if it is required, the high school is responsible for submitting this form to the college. However, you will need to request that it be sent. It is important to know and follow your school's procedures.

TIP: Usually the person at your school (probably your counselor) completing this form asks for information from students and parents ahead of time. If possible, meet with this person before he or she writes a letter of recommendation.

E. Mid-Year Report Form: This form is not required by all colleges but, if it is required, it will be submitted by your high school. However, you must request that it be sent. The purpose of the form is for the college to see your grades from the first term of your senior year.

F. Teacher Recommendation Form: Not required by all colleges, but the teacher is responsible for sending this form. However, you are responsible for asking a teacher to complete it and giving that teacher all the necessary information. Look over this form and imagine what one of your teachers would say about you. Colleges are not only looking for teachers from courses where you have received an A, but from teachers who know you well and can talk about your work ethic, inquisitive nature and motivation to learn.



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WRAP-UP

Keep in Mind:

The college search and application process can be very complicated and stressful if students don't TAKE THE TIME to manage the process carefully. Students should first take into account their interests before choosing a school because not just any school can meet all of the students' needs. Campus visits and college fairs are great ways to gain information that can help students' determine if a school is the right "fit." Once determining a list of schools, remind students that they should carefully fill out applications, making sure to consult the handouts and assignments that they have done thus far to facilitate the completion of their applications.

Homework:

1. Instruct students that, if they haven't already done so, it is now time to sit down and talk with their parents about their college options.
2. Not only can students share all they have learned through the program, but they can ask their parents for their thoughts on college possibilities.
3. Students should also encourage their parents to attend the awards ceremony at the end of final session of the program.

