I’ve Never Heard of That College…
It Must Not Be Any Good!

Session D
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“I’ve Never Heard of that College… It Must Not Be Any Good!”

Looking beyond the rankings to help students choose colleges for fit.
What we will cover

• The notion of fit or match
• Approaching the college search process with an educated lens
• Having conversations with students/families
• Constructing the college list
Our Challenges

- Improve the way we do business
- Help students and parents to be better consumers
College Fit/Match

- Myth: There is one perfect college for me.

- Fact: There are over 3,000 U.S. colleges
College Fit/Match

- The college search process is a personal and intimate experience.
- Students should be encouraged to think about what factors are most important to them.
- Students may need to be challenged to think about the process differently.
Factors to Consider: 
Campus Environment

Independent of the academic experience, an institution’s social scene – or lack thereof – can be a significant factor in a student’s overall happiness/decision to transfer.

Questions to Ask:

• What percentage of students live on campus?
  • Residential versus commuter campuses
• How many students stick around on the weekends?
  • Is the school a suitcase campus?
• In what types of activities do students engage when they’re not attending class?
  • How receptive is the campus to different student populations?
  • What about the community?
Factors to Consider: 
Student Support Services

Services can vary dramatically across campuses

Questions to Ask:
• What types of academic and personal services do you offer students?
• Are any of the services mandatory?
• Is there a cost associated with any of the services?
Factors to Consider: **Faculty Accessibility**

Professor/student interaction is an underemphasized dimension that leads to academic success.

**Questions to Ask:**
- What is the **student-to-faculty ratio**?
  - Not an absolute measure of quality – consider faculty roles
- How large are the classes – especially in your intended area of study?
  - How does the registration process work? Do students often get “shut out” of classes due to cap sizes?
- What percentage of GTAs (Graduate Teaching Assistants) are teaching undergraduate courses? At what level?
- How often to faculty make themselves available for office hours?
Factors to Consider: Most Popular vs. Strongest Major

There can be a dramatic difference between the two, but the reason(s) behind what makes a major the most popular or the strongest are worth knowing.

Popular could mean larger class sizes
Strongest could mean better resources/facilities

Questions to Ask:
- What is your strongest major and why?
- Is this also your most popular major?

Do not ask:
- Is (insert major) a strong/popular major?
The College Search Process

Having the Conversation……..

1. Get them talking, ask them what is most exciting to them
2. Listen carefully
3. Go over the “Factors to Consider”
4. Have them identify the factors that they cannot do without
5. Encourage them to do research and own the process

*Include family in the conversation when appropriate*
Conducting Effective Research
Student initiated, counselor aided

- Use Multiple Resources
- Cross Reference resources/lists
- Use Resources that give you the information you need
  - Colleges that Change Lives
  - Fiske Guide to Colleges
  - The College Finder
  - Rugg’s Recommendations on the Colleges
Constructing the List

Goal is to have options

1. Are there an appropriate range of schools?
2. Are there an appropriate number of schools on the list?
3. Does the list make sense to you?
4. Provide feedback and suggestions
5. Have student refine the list until everyone is satisfied
Parental/Family Involvement

Family should play a vital role in the college admission process.

- The benefits of family involvement in the college admission process are substantial
- Interest level varies from family to family
- Can be a source of conflict – collaboration, communication and balance are essential
- Helping families to recognize boundaries
  - Some view the college admission process as an evaluation of their caregiving skills – an important concept to consider
USNWR Graduation Rates

Understanding and using the data for college choice and fit.
How to Help Students and Parents Read the USNWR More Critically (What does selectivity really mean?)

- Peer assessment (25%)
- Finances/Faculty Resources (35%)
- Inputs (15%)
- Outcomes (25%)
What to consider when looking at graduation rates.

- 4-yr vs. 6-yr rates
- Residential, full-time student vs. part-time commuter
- Small college vs. large university system
What do graduation rates reflect?

- Institutional Resources
- Institutional Commitment
- Resources of Student Body
- Academic Preparation of Student Body
Where to find graduation rate and other college data

- **U-CAN- Univ & College Accountability Network**
  www.ucan-network.org/members.asp

- **IPEDS College Navigator**
  http://nces.ed.gov/collgenavigator/

- **Big Future and You Can Go!**
  Bigfuture.org and YCG.org

- **College Websites**
Where to find information about post-graduation activities


- National Science Foundation, Division of Science Resources Statistics *Baccalaureate Origins of S&E Doctorate Recipients*

- Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS)
National Survey of Student Engagement

Why should everyone learn about NSSE?
What is the NSSE?

- NSSE is a national survey designed to assess the extent to which first-year and senior students engage in a variety of educationally effective activities.
- The foundational premise is that students who are actively involved in both academic and out-of-class activities gain more from the college experience than those who are not as involved AND that level of involvement is a meaningful measure of institutional quality.
What is “student engagement”? 

According to NSSE, it is the intersection of:

- The time and energy students devote to educationally sound practices, and
- The policies and practices institutions use to encourage students to take part in these activities.
Which “educationally effective practices” does NSSE address?

- Student-faculty contact
- Active learning
- Prompt feedback
- Time on task
- High expectations
- Cooperation among students
- Respect for diverse talents and ways of learning
NSSE Benchmarks

- Level of academic challenge
- Active and collaborative learning
- Student-faculty interaction
- Enriching educational experiences
- Supportive campus environment
Where to go to find NSSE information?

- USA Today/NSSE website:

- Individual School Websites
Raising the Bar: Employers’ Views on Skills Needed in the Wake of the Economic Downturn (Survey conducted for AAC&U)

- Written and Oral Communication
- Critical Thinking /Analytical Reasoning
- Complex Problem Solving
- Teamwork in Diverse Groups
- Creativity and Innovation
- Ethical Decision Making
- Applied Knowledge in Real World Setting
Next Steps

- Consider your school and how you can create change
- Educate your colleagues
- Challenge the status quo