**Exploring Colleges (Mostly!) Virtually**

**The good news is that colleges are beginning to open up after the coronavirus pandemic led to campus shutdowns. However, college road trips this year will still look different than in past years. Some changes you will see are limited in-person tours with social distancing, dedicated in-person tours for admitted students only, improved virtual campus tours online, and even narrated drive through events such as a scavenger hunt.**

***Early planning is key to exploring colleges right now! To get started*:**

***Step 1: Go to Each College’s Website*** (“**Undergraduate Admissions”** and/or “**Visit Us”**)

Sign up for **Virtual Information Sessions, Webinars, Tours, College Fairs:** A live or pre-recorded session will help you learn more about a college’s academic programs, student life, and how to navigate the admission and financial aid process. Virtual information sessions are typically led by a member of the admissions staff and may be followed by Q&A via live chat.

Take a **Virtual Tour**: Each college will lead you through different types of tours. Many will ask for your information (fill that out as some schools track your demonstrated interest). Some offer tours based on your interests. Virtual tours will let you look at different parts of the campus using interactive maps and other tools.

**Find an In-Person Tour**: Some colleges are open for tours, but you will have to book them in advance. Tour groups may be limited to one family at a time, you will probably fill out a form asking you about COVID-19 symptoms, and you might not be allowed in certain (or any!) buildings. If you do an in-person tour, also check out the local community! Take photos especially if you are visiting multiple colleges in one trip!

Explore the **Academics page:** If you have a particular major in mind, **see what courses you would be taking**. Read descriptions of the classes, learn about elective classes available and find out the requirements for each major. This can help you decide if a college is the right fit for your academic and career goals.

Explore **Student Life**: Look at the housing page, check out dining options, athletics and intramurals, clubs and organizations, student government, diversity, cultural opportunities.

**Investigate Support Services:** On each college's website, you can learn about the services it provides to help students succeed. Academic support can include tutoring, writing assistance and study-skills courses. Other support includes help with the financial aid process, counseling and career-planning services. Also investigate how the college has been supporting its students during this unusual time!

Look at the **College’s Admission Requirements** and Deadlines: Note the various application deadlines. (Regular, Early Action, Early Decisions…). Make sure you meet the basic requirements such as the right number of math, science and language courses. Also look at Naviance (if your high school uses it) or websites with scattergrams such as Cappex to see if each school is a **Realistic**, **Reach**, or **Safety** school for you.

**Step 2: Contact Alumni and/or Current Students**

Use online resources or ask friends and family (or me!) to get contact information for alumni or current students. Some colleges are hosting live chat rooms where prospective students can chat with current students. Finding someone in your major can be especially helpful!

**Step 3: Find Student Created Videos**

You can look on **YouVisit** and **Campus Reel** for unofficial videos that may give you insight into student life on and off campus. *TIP: Want to REALLY know what goes on with the student body? Look at social media accounts that AREN’T accounts connected to the college. These are places to find out about the true, organic, culture of the school.*

**Step 4: Look at Other Online Resources**

**College Express** and **Unigo** are helpful for searches by area, major, etc… Also look for **online** webinars and virtual college fairs to help you gather even more information.

**Step 5: Fill Out a “*College Comparison Chart”*** (I have one for you!)

* **Keep track of your findings**! Don’t get different colleges mixed up! Note things you like, or don’t like!
* Modify the chart to include what is important to you.
* If you can’t find information, ask me or contact an admissions representative from the college (their contact information will be on the school’s website).
* Here are suggested items to note:

1. Campus and surrounding community- Is it walkable, safe, accessible, thriving…?
2. Your Potential Major or Minor – any special entrance requirements (portfolio, audition…?
3. Social Life - athletics, religious, Greek life, sports, clubs, etc.
4. Would it be a Safety, Target or Reach for you? (I can help you determine this based on your qualifications and resume)
5. Residential Life and Dining: Are freshmen required to live on campus, are there special residential interest groups, could you have a car…?)
6. Application requirements: Are standardized tests optional or required (*MAKE SURE YOU LOOK AT INFO FOR THE CORRECT YEAR AND TERM*), # of letters of recommendations required, essays required, application deadlines (note dates for “early decision”, “early action”, “regular decision” … )
7. Costs and financial aid information (If test scores are optional for admission are they still required for school scholarships, are there separate applications for scholarship consideration,is it automatic…?). What percentage of need is met? **Will you need to submit a FAFSA and/or CSS Profile**?
8. Other notes important to **you** such as transportation costs, local area, study abroad options, job placement rates, quarter or semester schedule, class sizes, faculty: student ratio…

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