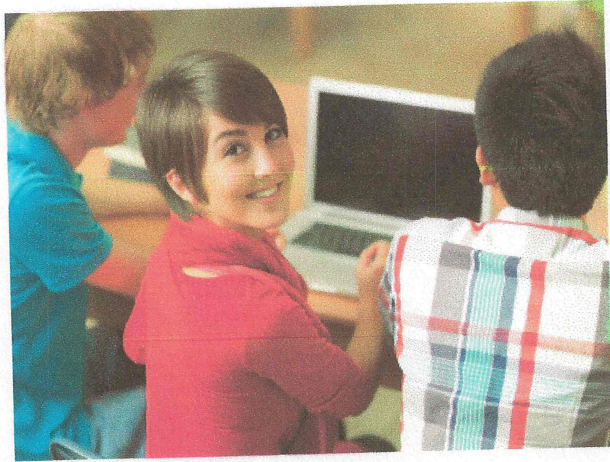


Admission 101: What You Need to Know

It's not your parents' college search. Way back in the days of yore, high school students pored over college guidebooks the size of doorstops, actually used the Post Office to communicate with admission offices, and painstakingly filled in their applications using a typewriter.



Those guidebooks can still be a big help, but students today have many more ways to research and apply to colleges. The Internet has made gathering information easy. But it can be hard to tell whether all that information is reliable. And online applications can make envelopes and stamps seem positively archaic. But electronic applications can be just as tricky as their paper counterparts. What's a high-tech student to do?

For some helpful hints on using the latest technology in your college search, read on for a quick course in

Admission Tech 101.

Lesson One: Just because it's on the Internet doesn't make it true. Okay, so that seems really basic for a tech-savvy person like yourself. But it's important to keep in mind for everyone that ever received an email about a nonexistent virus. (Quick! Forward this to 200 of your closest friends or the world will end!)

This lesson holds true for college-search sites, too. You probably won't find listings for nonexistent colleges. But you could end up with out-of-date application deadlines or lists of majors. Also, most college search sites include only the colleges that paid the site to list them. That's why you'll get different college lists from different sites (even if you plug in the same preferences).

"Use comparative Web sites only for a general feel and opinions," advises a representative from the University of Southern California. "Even the best can be only as good as the information they're given."

In other words, use the college-search sites as a starting point. Don't depend on just one site—get lists from several of them. Then go to the Web sites of individual colleges to get the real scoop.

Lesson Two: Don't judge a college by its Web site. You can learn a lot about a college from its Web site. Many colleges have extensive sites that include faculty and student Web pages, detailed information about majors and programs, and even virtual campus tours.

Other colleges have more basic Web sites: They may have good information, but they're definitely not high on the "wow!" meter.

Don't be fooled by the quality (or lack of quality) of a college Web site. A poor Web site tells you only that the college has not yet invested a lot in its Web presence. It says next to nothing about the quality of the college itself.

"The college with the best Web site—just like the one with the best publication—is not always the best college for a particular student," says a representative at Alfred University (NY).

The one exception to this principle may be students interested in a high-tech major. A well-done Web site may indicate a greater commitment to keeping up with the latest technology. That may not matter much to a history major, but a potential Web designer or software programmer may need a college on the cutting edge.

Lesson Three: Go undercover. Of course, you need to know a college's majors, activities, and application requirements. But don't stop with the admission office's home page.

"First, look for the student newspaper online, and second, look for links to students' Web pages," says a director of admission at an Oregon institution. "You can find good 'unofficial' or 'undercover' information on the institution." Plus, you can e-mail students and ask them questions about the school.

Undercover information can give you a more in-depth view of the college. It can tell you what the hot issues on campus are (fraternities? politics? bad cafeteria food?) and what students are interested in.

Other pages that can give you good information:

- Faculty home pages—some post detailed syllabuses of their classes.
- Department home pages—get information about majors from the people who teach them.
- Student organizations—check out the schedule for clubs and teams or see what resolutions were passed by the Student Senate.
- Alumni association pages—what are alumni of the college doing now? What is the college doing for its alumni?

Lesson Four: An application is an application. Most colleges accept both paper and electronic applications. Many colleges prefer electronic applications because they make it easier to track student data. However, the type of application submitted won't make a difference in the admission decision.

Tech-savvy students may find applying electronically to be easier and more efficient. But there are some pitfalls to electronic applications.

Some paper applications can be difficult to read due to poor handwriting and some online applications are hard to read because students slip into their poor e-mail writing patterns.

It's easy to click a button and send an application to a college. But make sure that you take an online application just as seriously as a paper one.

Lesson Five: Sometimes old ways are best. One of the best resources in the college search and application process is still your guidance or college counselor. He or she has firsthand information on colleges, has helped hundreds of students through the process, and can get to know you face to face. Even the most technologically advanced Web site can't top that!

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