
COLLEGE ADMISSION LESSONS

Lesson 1

Just because it's on the Internet doesn't make it true. Okay, so that seems really basic for a tech-savvy person like you. But it's important to keep in mind for everyone that ever received an e-mail about a nonexistent virus. 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 But you could end up with out-of-date application deadlines or lists of majors.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 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 2

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. Because the Web is still fairly new, some colleges are farther ahead than others. 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 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 3

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 Palmer Muntz, director of admission at the Oregon Institute of Technology. "Not all schools will have these, but when they do, 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 the Outing Club or see what resolutions the Student Senate passed.
- Alumni association pages-what are alumni of the college doing now? What is the college doing for its alumni?

Lesson 4

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. Colleges work hard to make sure there's no difference in difficulty for the applicant or the impression they make on the admission committee. Even so, tech-savvy students may find applying electronically to be easier and more efficient. But there are some pitfalls to electronic applications. "Some paper applications are hard to read due to poor handwriting," says Muntz. "Similarly, 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 5

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!