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**Parent Coffee on Visiting Colleges**

Handout: Taken from CA College Counseling Handbook, available on line through CA website.

<http://www.columbusacademy.org/assets/documents/CollegeHandbook2011-12Web.pdf>

**Introduction**

Think of college like you would about real estate: you should go to a lot of open houses, know what investment you're getting into, and know what you'll be paying for.

Paying for college is, in the view of the government, the parents' responsibility. In starting to look at colleges, cost may be one parameter on the search. Talk as a family about whether parents will pay the amount that the government says they should pay, or whether the student will need to get a scholarship or attend an in-state school (where the tuition is similar to Columbus Academy's). Each college must have a "net price calculator" on its website that will tell parents how much they would be expected to pay. This is a new federal requirement and it is a good idea to check more than one of these in case they are not working perfectly yet.

There may be other parameters on the search based on what is important to a particular family. Geography can be one (within driving distance, one plane flight, etc.) Other things that particular families might value include such things as desire to be exposed to a large city, religious identity, internships and externships, strong undergraduate teaching. Parents should communicate boundaries early and often to the student. If particular colleges and universities are outside the boundaries (i.e. parents do not want children to go to them), students should not apply.

**First Visits**

There are lots of good colleges and universities within easy driving distance in Ohio. You can visit them to get a first experience with taking tours, seeing marketing savvy at work, etc. These include smaller schools: Kenyon, Denison, Wooster, Ohio Wesleyan, Wittenberg, and others. How many parents have been on the Ohio State campus? An admissions tour will show you another side of the school. Case Western Reserve is a nearby example of a mid-size research university. Miami is also medium-sized. Families should get comfortable with the college visiting process before visiting what might be the child's first choice.

About 30% of Academy students stay in state for college. State schools such as Miami are now recruiting out-of-state students, so the student bodies at these schools are more geographically diverse than one might think.

Another option is to visit colleges when you're traveling for other reasons, such as to visit relatives or on vacation. If you're going to a particular area, email the college counselors for ideas about schools to visit. Juniors have a map showing college locations and the college counseling office has a map book, so families can pick a region and find several colleges to visit.

Parents should be aware that the counselors want to expose students and their families to colleges and universities that they might not be familiar with or thinking about. If it turns out that the student isn't interested in a particular school after visiting, that reaction is valuable information in the process of going through the big funnel to arrive at the one school a student will attend, one where they'll grow into the best adult they can be.

Arriving at a student's final choice of college is an individual process. There is no extra value in being admitted to many colleges; it just takes one. Remember that college applications and selection are a sensitive topic for students so it is often best not to ask other kids about it.

## **College Types and Characteristics**

### *Public*

Tend to be big, research-oriented, state-funded. (The Carnegie classification measures the level of research activity at colleges and universities).

### *Single Sex*

Two or three all-male. More all-female, including Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Chatham, Scripps. They have lots of resources and if girls don't look at them, the counselors will ask them why not. High percentage of female PhDs in the sciences attended women's colleges.

### *Co-op*

Very popular in a down economy, these schools combine work experience with school. They include Northeastern, Drexel, some programs at the University of Cincinnati. For some kids, these offer a valuable experience.

### *Small Liberal Arts and Sciences*

Perhaps 40% of Academy graduates choose these. They have a strictly (usually) undergraduate focus, with classes taught by professors (not graduate teaching assistants), smaller class sizes, and a focus on critical thinking, writing, and communication skills no matter what the major. It is often easier to participate in athletics at these schools. Study abroad is usually easy. There is no pre-professional training (such as a marketing or accounting major). Rather than a pre-med major,

students wanting to go to medical school just need to be sure they take the courses required for med school. (Fun fact: math majors have the highest law school acceptance rate.)

### *Research Universities*

Larger private universities, large public universities, and some medium-sized. These include Case, Carnegie Mellon, Johns Hopkins.

### *Technical Universities*

These include MIT, CalTech, Fashion Institute of Technology, Rochester Institute of Technology, RPI. Art schools include CCAD, Savannah, RISD, Pratt, Art Institute of Chicago.

### *Work Colleges*

Open only to lower income students. Berea College in Kentucky is an example.

This should give families a broad sense of what is out there. Hit a broad smattering first, then narrow down to schools of particular interest to your student.

## **During College Visits**

Remember who it is that will be going to college. Take the guided tour if at all possible. Ask the guide what his or her least favorite thing is about the school. Try to have lunch or coffee where you can observe students. Ask your child how they feel about what they see. Check flyers, newspapers, talk to random students (or to CA grads at the school). Smile at people and see how they react. Take pictures, keep a journal, list the pros and cons (otherwise they all start to look the same). The student is in the driver's seat, but parents' opinions matter too. Try not to visit more than two per day. You can arrange to meet with professors or coaches. Be sure to have the name of an admissions office contact when you leave, in case you think of questions later. (This could be the person who leads an information session.) If the child has an interview, he or she should be relaxed and be him or herself. The advantage of visiting places during spring break of junior year is that colleges and universities are more likely to be in session then than over the summer. Many families do a broad set of visits in spring and summer and then a more tailored round in the fall of senior year.

Most colleges have a regional admissions person. This person will be reading applications from our area, may well visit CA. Students can't control everything, but they can control how they interact with this person. "Demonstrated interest" is a growing factor in college admissions, especially at smaller schools. Students need to be aware of how they are perceived (e.g. body language could send wrong impression). The appropriate contact person at each college is in Naviance and students are encouraged to follow up as appropriate (a lesson that will serve them well in later life).

## Questions and other topics

At most colleges, tours and visits can be scheduled on-line. Except during peak times, this is best done 2-3 weeks in advance.

The college counselors start working with students in junior year. There is no advantage to starting earlier and it only gives students longer to worry. Parent/student college night for sophomores is March 6<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m., as listed in a letter sent by the college counselors. The juniors have just started college counseling class, which meets once per rotation. For parents of juniors, the college counselors will be included in conference sign-ups for early February. Parents can call or email college counselors with concerns at any time.

Colleges buy names of students with various characteristics (zip codes, PSAT scores). Marketing is a big part of today's college admissions scene.

Some schools do not require the SAT or ACT (but often require something else, such as example of student work, instead). There is a list of these at [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org). This is good for kids with test anxiety, who know that there are places where the test scores are irrelevant.

If interviews are available for juniors who are visiting colleges over spring break, students should have an interview; they may not be there again before applying. They should be sure to ask the interviewer questions. If students want a mock interview in advance of visit, this can be arranged through college counseling office.

The next coffee, on standardized testing, is on January 26.