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Final Decision: College Choice

You've already narrowed your college choices. Here are some tips to help you make a final decision.

Not-So-Obvious College Questions

College Cost:

What is my actual cost? Other expenses beyond just the "sticker price" for tuition can include:

- Lab fees
- Returned check fees
- Fee to add/drop a course
- Transportation home
- Key replacement
- Computer/Internet fees
- Car expenses (gas, parking, insurance, etc.)
- ID card replacement
- Application and doc fees
- Late tuition penalty
- Security deposit

What is the average increase in tuition and other costs from year to year?

View at least three years worth of data to chart past increases.

What are the opportunities for employment on or near campus?

Finding a job close to campus could mean doing without the expense of a car.

Academics:

How easy is it to switch majors? Will it mean spending more time in school? What other majors are available?

How will Advanced Placement (AP)/previous college credits be counted? Will credits be equal in value?

What percentage of students graduate in four years? Ask for an explanation if the on-time graduation rate is low. Is it difficult to get into required classes?

What kind of career planning services are available? Does the college offer any placement services?

Living on Campus:

Is your prospective college safe? Ask if your school has emergency call boxes, campus escorts and ID checks.

What meal options are available? What is served in the cafeteria? What's available when the cafeteria is closed?

What kind of health facilities and services does the college offer? 24-hour emergency care? Nearest hospital?

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Take a Tour of Your Favorite College...

On campus...

- **Schedule an appointment.** Be ready with multiple dates and times. Avoid major events or holidays. Arrange to speak to other students, professors, the financial aid, admissions and career offices. Ask about a guided tour.
- **Stay overnight.** You can talk to other students and see what life on campus is really like.
- **Pack smart.** You may want to pack more casual clothes for when you walk around campus, and something more formal for an interview with the admissions office.
- **Take notes as you visit.** If you visit several colleges (especially in one day), the details can get blurry.
- **Go to a class.** Note class size, instructors, difficulty level.
- **View other campus buildings.** Check out residence hall rooms, cafeterias, computer labs, health and recreational facilities, the library, etc.

...Or off campus

- **Research online.** Check out the college's website. Is there a virtual tour that you can take online?
- **Communicate with the college directly.** Call or e-mail the admissions and financial aid offices. Some colleges offer chatrooms. Write down the name of the person with whom you spoke.
- **College fairs.** Let colleges come to you. Ask your counselor about upcoming fairs and prepare some questions to ask the college's representative.
- **Use your personal network.** Talk to counselors, family members, siblings and friends and find someone who attended your prospective college. Ask about their experiences and impressions.