

College Organizer

You gather info. You tour. You apply. You are confused. And you blow deadlines. This organizer will make easier work of the endless grind that is applying to college.

Designer Label

Buy a big storage crate. Buy some folders. Put stuff from each college you'll apply to in a separate folder. Then make copies of this label (or print them out at www.usnews.com/organizer) and tape 'em to the folders. You will not be sorry!

Name of school: _____

Mailing address: _____

Your online application login: _____

Your password: _____

Name of helpful admissions officer you've spoken with: _____

Officer's phone number: _____

Officer's E-mail address: _____

Deadline for early action/admission: _____

Deadline for regular admission: _____

Deadline/contact info for setting up interview on campus or with local alum: _____

Number of recommendations needed: _____

Campus Tour Cliché Checklist

(and what you should ask your guide)

“Welcome to the campus tour! Betcha didn’t know our school has the world’s largest collection of books whose titles begin with the letter *p*! And the dining facility has the largest dishwasher outside of the Pentagon!” On a typical tour, type-A student guides spill out an abundance of fast facts. Prick up your ears, high schoolers, and see how many clichés you encounter—and whether a well-placed follow-up question can extract more useful info.

- “We have 9,000 student groups. If you don’t like any of them, you can find two friends and start one....”** Three or four students is usually all any school requires for formation and recognition of a group. This doesn’t mean the group will actually do anything during the year or that the student government will fund it. **Ask how much money student groups receive from the university and what it takes for a new group to qualify for support.**
- “Our computer labs are open 24 hours a day....”** This sales pitch, like the dial-up modem, is nearing obsolescence. At many schools, students must bring their own computers. At others, computers have become ubiquitous—from E-mail terminals in the bookstore and the gym to rentable laptops at the library. Finding a time and place to log on is rarely a problem, even if you don’t have your own iBook. **Ask if the school has any in-house geeks who will help if you have trouble with a computer.**
- “We are focused on undergraduate research....”** Nothing new here. Undergrad research has been around for the past decade or so as a way to enliven the undergrad experience. **Ask what type of projects students are working on, whether full professors oversee the work, and how much credit students receive—in terms of acknowledgment in publications, not just course credit.**
- “Every year, students frolic in the frothy waters of the fountain....”** Campus architects have a penchant for fountains. Invariably, the tour guide will talk about a venerable campus tradition: throwing soap, taking a swim before finals, dunking freshmen. **Ask the tour guide what happens to students who go too far.**
- “The library has over 850 million books and belongs to a consortium that will send you more....”** The number of books is an easily digestible stat that guides like to toss out for pre-frosh, but a library’s in-house resources are only a small part of what students have access to. Anyway, nearly all universities belong to the interlibrary loan system. **Ask whether the library’s budget has been cut in the past five years.**
- “If you stay late at the gym, you can dial 12345 from a campus phone and security will take you home....”** Most schools with a campus security detail will offer to escort students after dark. Larger schools usually have a campus taxi service of some sort to shuttle students around. **Ask whether this free service is available when you are too tipsy to stagger home under your own power.**
- “Alumni and professors are great about getting students internships....”** Of course, they are! It’s one of the reasons to go to school in the first place. **The question to pose: How will the school prepare me for life after college if I can’t rely on the kindness of alums?**

My Visit to _____ U

“Loved the sushi, hated the spumoni!”

So this family goes to visit some colleges. They drive past the guard station at the entrance to the first campus. And the daughter shrieks, “There’s no way I can go to this school!” What was it? The guard’s uniform? The way the gate swung open? As you make your grand tour, maybe you will want to take some notes so you can keep track of the little things you hated. And loved. Make copies of this page, or print them out at www.usnews.com/organizer. Fill them in when you leave the campus.

Name of school: _____

What I liked about it: _____

What I didn’t like about it: _____

Would I fit in? _____

How was the food?*

*EDITOR’S NOTE: No, you should not base your decision solely on the quality of the vegan burgers (or the absence thereof).

If this were the only school I got into, would I really want to go, or would I be crushingly disappointed? Be honest! Nobody will read this but you:
