Dec-1995

Editor's Notebook: The College Selection Road Trip

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol14/iss2/4

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EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

The College Selection Road Trip

Summer vacations for many parents with college bound children have become frantic day trips to visit schools eager to welcome potential inductees into the 1990s version of debtors prison. For someone who has now gone through this ritual for two summers in a row, I have become something of an expert on how to handle this hectic and scary process of choosing a college where your kids can grow to maturity while you fret over the bottom line.

For those of you who are about to enter this summer ritual, here is my ten point guide to successfully meeting the challenge of the college visitation circuit.

1. Get the map out and target a region where there is more than one college to visit. If you are going to spend gas money and endless hours in the car, at least be able to say at the end of the day that you hit a few schools.

2. Pack a lunch and a lot of junk food because the trick is to make a kind of blitzkrieg attack through the region, stopping only to take the tour and move on to the next school.

3. Time the arrival at the school at the exact beginning of the tour. Precision is important if you intend to make this a successful blitzkrieg. Shortcuts can be made by simply driving through the college and have your son or daughter make visual contact.

4. While on the tour try not to embarrass your college bound son or daughter by asking the typical parent questions like, what are the crime statistics for the campus and what about the alcohol situation in the dorms? The answer to the first question is always "crime is almost non existent," while the answer to the second question is always "yes, drinking does occur, but we frown upon it."

5. Be prepared to see endless athletic facilities, computer stations, dormitory rooms, student unions and libraries. Don't be surprised if you hear this simple refrain a thousand times "The professors really care about the students."

6. Although you would like to avoid it, give in and visit the bookstore and purchase the over-priced memento of your trip to the college. You'll probably end up with a dozen T-shirts by the end of the summer but it is hard to say no.

7. Get back into the car and rush to your next tour. While in the car gobble the junk food as you peruse the glitzy admissions materials that were given to you at the last college. Caution: all this literature will show a picturesque campus, earnest professors and contented students.

8. After repeating steps 4 through 6 get back in the car and begin the inevitable comparison process as you and your teenager discuss likes and dislikes. You will quickly find out that the school you thought was just great has been dismissed out of hand by your son or daughter. Remember, its the "feel" of the school that matters and anything from a pushy tour guide to a ugly dorm room can spell doom for a college.

9. Drive back home exhausted, confused and slightly dazed once it settles in that in going to college there is no such thing as a free lunch. College in the 90's is indeed the real $64,000 Question.

10. The next day, after you decompress from your ordeal, remember you have only just begun the college selection process. There is still your son or daughters anxiety over writing the required personal essay, the minutiae related to filling out the financial aid forms, the apprehension around April 1st as the acceptance and rejection letters come in and the final act of bravery, making the fateful choice. But don't fret too much about the college visitation circuit and its aftermath. If anything this process will bring the family together and create an opportunity for real communication about life, interests and dreams. Those road trips and all the paperwork that follows are certain to be cherished memories.

Michael Kryzanek, Editor