

EducationQuest Foundation

College Planning Bulletin

A monthly college planning guide from EducationQuest Foundation for Nebraska high school students

March 2005

Juniors: It's time to start looking at colleges

Start looking at colleges your junior year so you can narrow your choices by the time you're a senior. Campus visits are an essential part of finding the right school for you. Follow these tips for successful campus visits.

Visit your top three or four colleges while school is in session. You won't get the true flavor of the school during breaks or finals week.

Contact the admissions office at least two weeks before your visit to schedule a tour and overnight stay if possible. Ask for appointments with an admissions representative, financial aid counselor and a faculty member in an area of study that interests you.

Discuss your past achievements and future expectations with the admissions representative. Your job is to find a college with a thriving academic and social environment; theirs is to find qualified candidates. Ask about academic scholarships.

Talk to a faculty member about upper level classes in your anticipated major. Many students change majors because they didn't realize the degree of difficulty.

Ask the financial aid counselor how the college may offset tuition costs and about scholarship applications and deadlines.

Attend a freshman level class. Notice how students interact with the professor, and how the class is structured. You may prefer a large college with lecture style classes, or a small setting with one-on-one contact.

Request a guided tour with a current student. Find out what current students are passionate about and what they complain about. Ask about the Greek system, the athletic scene, and other social options.

Tour a residence hall and eat the cafeteria food. Ask about the personality of each hall so you can request one that suits you.

Take another walk around campus. Pick up a school newspaper and notice the posters on campus. Take notes of your trip and compare it to your other top schools. Ask yourself if you can spend the next four years of your life here.

Web resources available to help you with your search

Web resources are available to help you determine which colleges you want to visit. Find information about Midwest colleges in *College Profiles* at www.educationquest.org. Detailed information about Nebraska colleges is available in *Educational Opportunities Beyond High School in Nebraska* at <http://edweblab.unl.edu/edopportunities/default.html>.

Seniors: What happens after you submit the FAFSA?

By now, you have probably submitted the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Here's what happens next.

Expect your SAR and Award Letter

You'll receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) after you submit the FAFSA. This acknowledges that your form was processed, and can be used to make corrections to your FAFSA. You'll need the Personal Identification Number you used to file the FAFSA to make electronic corrections.

The colleges you indicated on the FAFSA will then send you a financial aid award letter detailing the assistance they're offering. They may offer a combination of scholarships, grants, work-study and student loans.

Compare Award Letters

Compare award letters from the colleges. Some may offer more in scholarships and grants, while others rely on student loans. Calculate your out-of-pocket expenses for each school to get the whole financial picture. Use EducationQuest's online [Award Letter Comparison Calculator](#) to determine which school offers the best deal. Sign and return the award letters.

Keep looking for scholarships!

Many local, state and national scholarships have deadlines in March, April and May. Talk to your guidance counselor about scholarships that meet your criteria. In addition, visit free scholarship search sites such as *ScholarshipQuest* at www.educationquest.org, www.fastweb.com and www.fastaid.com.

March "To Do" List

Seniors

- Expect your Student Aid Report – use it to make corrections to the FAFSA
- Expect college acceptance letters during March and April
- Continue applying for scholarships

Juniors

- Register by March 4 for April 9 ACT
- Register by March 25 for May 7 SAT
- Schedule campus visits

EducationQuest Foundation is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to improve access to higher education in Nebraska. Through a permanent endowment, EducationQuest provides free college planning services at its locations in Kearney, Lincoln and Omaha; funds need-based scholarship programs; and provides community grants for programs that enhance college access. For more information, call EducationQuest Foundation, headquartered in Lincoln, at 800-303-3745 or visit www.educationquest.org.