



# 100

# COLLEGE QUESTIONS TO ASK

— DURING THE COLLEGE SEARCH —

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**Savvy College Planning** 

# 100 College Questions to Ask

When you are ready to start looking at colleges, it's crucial to know what questions to ask.

Unfortunately, too many parents and teenagers fail to adequately research colleges and universities before committing to one.

Failing to do a thorough job researching schools is a major reason why roughly a third of students attending four-year private and state colleges and universities end up transferring somewhere else.

Transferring is usually an expensive proposition since students almost always lose some academic credits which can ultimately delay graduation.

You don't have to ask every question on this list since not all of them will be relevant, but a great deal of the questions should be.

## Who You Should Be Talking To

Using this list as a guide can ideally require contacting these campus stakeholders:

- ✓ Admission/financial aid staffers
- ✓ Professors
- ✓ Current students
- ✓ Recent alumni
- ✓ Career office

The college admission office should be able to connect you with recent alumni, as well as current students, especially those in your child's intended major. I'd also recommend that during college visits you stop students and engage with them.

Some of the questions on this list you can ask during a visit or at a college fair. Others you can pose via email, phone calls, online chat or Zoom.

## Other Resources to Find Answers

Some questions you can answer yourself through online research on websites such as the following:

### [College Navigator](#)

On this federal website you can discover for individual colleges such things as four-year graduation rates, freshmen retention rates, cost of attendance, admission requirements, average institutional award packages, academic majors and more.



## [CollegeData](#)

Under a school's *Admissions* link, you can find admission rates, admission requirements and how colleges rank 19 admission factors for importance. Under the Financials link, look to see such things as what percentage of financial need that a school typically meets, average need-based aid packages and average merit awards. You can also compare average freshmen awards with those that undergraduates as a group receive to determine if awards typically drop after the first year.

## **Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity FREOPP.org**

Using federal statistics, this think tank offers valuable return on investment (ROI) figures for 30,000 [bachelor's degrees](#) and 14,000 [master's degrees](#) from public and private colleges across the country. You will probably be shocked at how the ROI for different academic majors, even at the most prestigious schools, will vary dramatically.

## [Forbes 2023 College Financial Grades: The Nation's Strongest and Weakest Schools](#)

This [report card](#) provides a financial health grade for more than 900 private college and universities. You don't want your child to attend a school that is in danger of folding.

## **School websites**

When researching collegiate candidates, it's important to drill down and look at the kind of education that students are getting in an academic department(s) that interests your child.

The educational quality among academic disciplines can vary dramatically. A university could have an excellent business school with great job placements, for instance, and a mediocre biology department with substandard lab facilities.

Check out the web pages of a school's relevant academic departments and look for information like this:

- ✓ Department's vision/mission statement
- ✓ Undergraduate advising
- ✓ Department's description of its undergraduate education
- ✓ Graduation outcomes—graduate and professional schools, jobs
- ✓ Number and background of professors in department
- ✓ Number of undergraduates in the major
- ✓ Undergraduate research opportunities
- ✓ Internships opportunities
- ✓ Faculty awards—especially best teacher honors
- ✓ Undergraduate awards such as Goldwater, Rhodes and Fulbright's



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- ✓ Departmental newsletter
  - ✓ Student organization devoted to this major

After identifying a promising school, your child should reach out to one or two professors in a department and ask them intelligent questions about the major. It should cause concern if the professors don't respond to your child's email.



# 100 College Questions to Ask

## Overall Campus

1. What distinguishes this institution from its peers?
2. What is this college most proud of?
3. How many undergraduates attend this college?
4. How many graduate students attend?
5. How diverse is this campus?
6. How fiscally fit is this college?
7. What is its bond rating?

## Academics

8. What is the average class size of introductory classes and upper-division courses?
9. When would I have to declare a major?
10. How widely are teaching assistants used, as opposed to professors, and for what roles?
11. How much interaction, if any, will the typical undergrad have with tenured and tenure-track professors and will it largely be confined to lecture halls?
12. How easy or difficult is it to enroll in the courses you need?
13. What are the typical class sizes for my intended major?
14. Is my intended discipline an impacted major and what will that mean for me?
15. Am I guaranteed the major that I'm interested in?
16. Are the admission standards higher for certain majors and, if so, how do I find out what they are?
17. How easy or difficult is it to change a major?
18. How much time do students typically spend on homework and in my intended major?



19. How much writing and reading are expected?
20. Is it possible to double major and if it's possible, would I be able to do so in four years?
21. Is the college on a semester, trimester or quarter system?

## **Academic Benefits**

22. Do you have an honors college?
23. What benefits does the honors college offer?
24. What are the academic requirements to qualify for the honors college?
25. Do you have a learning community or other freshman learning experiences?
26. Do seniors complete a capstone experience or project?
27. What is your academic advisory system like?
28. Is it possible to get a professor as my advisor?
29. What percentage of students study abroad?
30. Do students in my intended major tend to study abroad?
31. What opportunities are there for undergraduate research?
32. How many students participate in undergraduate research?
33. Do you have to declare a major when you apply to the university?
34. If you are exploring transferring to the college ask: how do I determine how many academic credits will transfer?

## **College Graduation Track Record**

35. What is your four-year graduation rate?
36. What is your five-year graduation rate?
37. What is the six-year grad rate?
38. What are the main reasons why students don't graduate on time?

39. What does it take to graduate in four years?
40. Will it take longer to graduate if you double major or select a specific major?
41. What percentage of freshmen return for sophomore year (freshmen retention rate)?
42. What are the major reasons why students leave prematurely?

## Academic Support

43. How do you provide academic advice to students?
44. Do you have a writing center?
45. What type of tutoring services do you have?
46. Do you have an orientation program for freshmen (transfer students)?
47. What kind of learning disability services do you offer?
48. How recent must a student's LD testing be to qualify for accommodations?

## Internships, Jobs and Graduate School

49. What can I expect from your school's career services office?
50. When can I access the career services office?
51. How active is the alumni network?
52. Is the career service office available for alumni?
53. What percentage of students at the college gets internships?
54. Is there a co-op program?
55. What is the job placement rate?
56. How is that job placement rate calculated and are they self-reported?
57. Are the figures self-reported?
58. What percentage of students goes on to graduate school or professional schools?
59. What are your school's feeder institutions for graduate and professional degrees?

**Note:** Families should look at the ROI at the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity (FREEOP.org) for figures on individual majors at individual colleges.

## Student Life

60. What kinds of dorm choices are there and is a room guaranteed after the first year?
61. What percentage of students lives in campus housing?
62. What are average rental prices off campus?
63. What medical and mental health services are available at the campus?
64. How do you access those medical and mental health services and how long are waits, if any?
65. Will my health insurance cover health services on campus and what is the alternative?
66. What percentage of the student body belongs to a sorority or fraternity?
67. How prevalent are drugs and alcohol on campus?

## Financial Aid and Merit Awards

68. What percentage of a student's financial need does the college typically meet?
69. What percentage of a student's financial need does the college typically meet after freshman year?
70. What is your average financial aid package?
71. What is the typical breakdown of loans versus grants?
72. What is the average merit award?
73. What are the requirements to receive a merit scholarship?
74. Do the merit scholarships require separate applications?
75. What happens to my financial aid package if it takes longer than four years to graduate?
76. What percentage of freshmen receive institutional grants and/or scholarships?
77. Do you charge more for certain academic majors?
78. What is the average federal PLUS Loan debt that parents assume?

79. What are the work-study opportunities and does everyone who requests a works-study job on the FAFSA get one at your school?
80. What is your process for appealing a need-based or merit-based award?
81. Do you award extra scholarships for such things as specific majors and talents?
82. Where can I learn more about your merit scholarships?
83. Does the percentage of aid that you meet typically shrink after freshman year?
84. Does your net price calculator provide an accurate estimate of what your school will cost me? Does it calculate merit awards or just need-based aid?
85. What is the average student loan debt that graduates leave with?
86. Does your institution give out athletic scholarships?
87. What is the student loan default rate at your school?
88. What is the average amount of debt that students graduate with?

### Questions Specifically for Current Students

Here are a few more questions to ask:

89. Why did you decide to attend this college?
90. If you had the power to change anything about the school, what would it be?
91. What do you like best about your college?
92. What do you like least about your college?
93. What kind of students succeed on your campus?
94. What students end up not fitting in?
95. What kind of teenagers would you recommend your college to?

### Questions for Recent Graduates

96. What was your experience like at your college?



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97. If you could turn back time, would you attend your alma mater again?
  98. What would you have changed?
  99. Do you feel your alma mater prepared you well for your future life and was it worth the cost?
  100. Do you feel your alma mater prepared you for a career?

