

## Preparing for the College Visit

### The **BIG** Idea

- What questions do I have about college? How can I find the answers?

### AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm Up (5–10 minutes)
- II. Questions, Questions (10–15 minutes)
- III. Answering the Basics (10 minutes)
- IV. Planning Your College Visit (10 minutes)
- V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

### MATERIALS

- PORTFOLIO PAGES:**
  - Portfolio pages 18–21, College Visit Planner
- STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:**
  - Student Handbook page 127, The Basics
- Laptop, LCD projector, and speakers
- Internet access
- Five sheets of chart paper
- Post-it notes, at least one per student
- Index cards, at least one per student
- Box with lid for collecting personal concerns (OPTIONAL)
- Field trip permission slip (if not already distributed)

### OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Ask questions they have about college.
- Determine the kinds of questions best answered by a college visit.

## OVERVIEW .....

In this lesson, students prepare for a visit to a local college by generating questions and researching answers. To focus their thinking, the lesson opens with an online video clip of young people—who are the first in their families to attend college—discussing their initial concerns and questions. After viewing, students write their own questions, and categorize them by topic (e.g., academic, social life, etc.). The heart of the lesson involves students distinguishing basic questions, which they answer by researching the college’s website, versus “qualitative” questions, which they will find answers to during the college visit. To assess students’ understanding of the difference, they will come up with two “not basic” questions to ask during the visit. The lesson concludes with the distribution of permission slips and reminders of how to dress and behave for the visit.

## PREPARATION .....

- List the day’s **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- Write the day’s vocabulary words and definitions on the board.
- The following handout needs to be made into an overhead transparency or copied onto chart paper:
  - **Portfolio pages 18–21, College Visit Planner.** Star the two to four sections you want your class to focus on during the campus tour. (For example, visit a dorm and visit the library.)
- If you have not already done so, obtain administrative permission for a field trip, following district guidelines for transportation and chaperones. Make arrangements to tour a nearby college. Duplicate permission slips for distribution during this lesson. Remember to get approval for costs associated with the trip. (**See lesson 1 for a detailed list of preparations for the college visit.**)
- Put the following headings on one sheet of chart paper each:
  - Students, Social Life/Campus Activities, Campus Facilities, Off-Campus Community, Academic Courses/Faculty
- Tape the chart papers in different areas around the classroom.
- For **Activity II: Questions, Questions**, determine pairs of students to work together.

- ❑ Bookmark the web pages for the college your class will be visiting on all computers students will use for **Activity II: Questions, Questions**.
- ❑ Preview the “First in the Family” video, and arrange to view it via Internet during class. Go to <http://www.firstinthefamily.org/highschool/Videos.html>. Students will watch the first five minutes of the video option “How to Make it to College.”

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION .....

College brochures, catalogs, and websites can answer basic questions about a college, but words and pictures alone will not provide the full picture. To get a first-hand feel for a school, students need to walk around the campus and see if they like the environment. Can they imagine themselves living there? Is it what they pictured? They need to talk to students and find out how they like the professors, what they do for fun, what the dorm life is like. They need to sit in classes to find out if they could learn better in a big lecture or a small workshop. They need to eat in the dining facility, and check out the scene there. While visiting colleges may not be possible for all families, students will greatly benefit from visiting the ones on the top of their lists.

## VOCABULARY .....

**Facilities:** Buildings where specific activities occur, such as computer labs, dance studios, sports complex, dining halls, etc.

**Campus:** The grounds and buildings of a university, college, or school.

**Faculty:** Professors and administrative staff at a university, college, or school.

## IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS .....

For **Activity III: Answering the Basics**, if computer or Internet access is limited, have students work in small groups or pairs, rather than individually. If you have no computer or Internet access, print out and make copies of the web pages for students to do the activity offline.

To increase student engagement you may wish to turn **Activity III: Answering the Basics** into a competition. The pair of students that correctly finishes their research first can win a prize.

## ACTIVITY STEPS

### I. Warm Up (5–10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Next week we will visit [insert name of local college you will be visiting]. Thinking about college, and what life will be like there, is very exciting. Those of you who are considering college probably have many questions. In today's lesson, we will prepare for our visit by thinking about your questions and conducting some research to see which answers we can find before our visit.

We are going to begin by watching a video of students who are the first in their families to attend college. Before going, they had many questions and concerns, some of which may feel familiar. As you watch, consider these questions:

- What are the students excited about?
  - What do they seem nervous about?
  - How are your feelings similar to theirs? How are they different?
2. [Link to <http://www.firstinthefamily.org/highschool/Videos.html> and click the video option: "How to Make it to College." Watch the first six interview clips (Eric, Rena, Gabriel, Milleny, Gabriel, Maly), then stop the video.]

### II. Questions, Questions (10–15 minutes)

1. [Divide the class into pairs and provide each pair with several Post-it notes.]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** How did watching/listening to the interviews make you feel? What kinds of questions did it bring to mind? In this activity, you will work with a partner to come up with two questions you have about college. You will write each question on a separate Post-it notes.

[Before they begin writing questions, direct students' attention to the five sheets of chart paper posted around the room. Explain that each heading has to do with an aspect of college that they can ask questions about. Walk around the room and briefly describe each category in the following way:

- **Students:** What students are like—their academic and social interests, backgrounds, social styles.
- **Social Activities/Campus Activities:** What non-academic activities the college has to offer, such as athletics, cultural events, clubs, teams, parties.

- **Campus Facilities:** Everything from dorms and dining halls to athletic facilities and the library.
- **Off-Campus Community:** Life outside of the college campus—restaurants, museums, shopping, nightlife.
- **Academic Courses/Faculty:** Work load, class sizes, how easy it is to arrange time to talk with professors.

[If necessary, model a question or two and categorize them. For example:

- “What do students do on weekends?” (Category: Social Activities/Campus Activities)
- “How many hours of class work do you have a night?” (Category: Academic Courses/Faculty)]

3. [Distribute index cards. Tell students that in addition to the two questions they write on the Post-it notes, they may use the index cards to write down any personal questions about college. These cards will not be posted around the room, and they should NOT write their names on the cards. Explain that you will collect the cards and discuss common personal questions after their visit to the college next week. You may wish to provide a specially-decorated box with a hole cut in the top as reassurance that others won’t see what they’ve written.]
4. [After students have written their questions, invite pairs up to stick their questions in the correct categories. When all of the questions are posted, read aloud the questions posted in each category. NOTE: It’s OK if there are duplicates.]

### III. Answering the Basics (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** How much do you already know about [insert name of local college you will be visiting]? Most colleges, including [insert name of local college], have websites and catalogs that provide basic information about the school—how many students attend, how much it costs, etc. To make the most of a college visit, you want to know all you can about the school before you go. It’s important that you don’t use up your valuable time on campus asking questions that can easily be answered from websites or catalogs. Instead, you should use this opportunity to observe what’s happening on campus and ask questions that only students, professors, and others at the school can answer.
2. [Refer students to **Student Handbook page 127, The Basics**. Explain to the class that they are to gather basic information about the college they are visiting next week.

Working individually, have students go online to the college's website to answer the questions on the student handout. Circulate around the classroom, offering help as needed, as students conduct their research. NOTE: See **Implementation Options** above if you have limited computer access.]

3. [When students complete the handout, have them come together for a whole-class discussion. Invite volunteers to read aloud answers to each question.]

#### IV. Planning Your College Visit (10 minutes)

1. [Project **Portfolio pages 18–21, College Visit Planner** on the overhead. Have students refer to their individual handouts of the same page. Direct them to star the sections you've starred on the overhead (see **Preparation**). Let them know that the class will focus on two to four sections with questions relevant to the college visit you've planned. Assign each student a specific question from the planner. On a separate piece of paper, record each student's name and what question she will be asking.]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** You will use this **College Visit Planner** during our college visit next week. As you can see, the questions are organized into the same categories as we discussed earlier in the lesson. For our visit, you will focus specifically on the questions in the following sections [insert sections your class will focus on]. Let's have volunteers read the questions aloud.
3. [After reviewing the **College Visit Planner**, instruct students to add two questions of their own in the blank spaces on the planner. These might be questions left over from **Activity II: Questions, Questions** that were not answered on the website. Alternatively, they may be brand new questions that have come up as a result of going through the lesson. NOTE: You may use students' ability to come up with two questions to evaluate their understanding of the overall lesson.]
4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** During the visit, you will investigate answers to all of these questions (the ones on the planner and the two you came up with). How could you find the answers to these questions? [List student responses on chart paper. Make sure students address all items listed below. Give students prompts if they are having trouble brainstorming answers.
  - Asking questions of students who go to the school
  - Asking questions of faculty

- Looking at student-produced materials (newspapers, activity calendars, etc.)
- Looking at posters for on- and off-campus events
- Checking out bulletin boards
- Picking up official school materials (e.g., brochures, financial aid forms)
- Touring the dorms, dining facilities, athletic facilities, library, etc.
- Walking around the campus]

## V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. [Distribute permission slips (if they have not been given out in a previous lesson).]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Remember, how you appear and behave reflects on our school. For the trip next week, please dress neatly and appropriately. [NOTE: You may give specific suggestions depending on your school's dress code and the college you're visiting.] I expect everyone to behave as young adults, and to treat the college —the people and the property —with respect.
3. [Review all of the logistics for the visit, such as:
  - Date, time, and location of where you will be meeting the students
  - What students need to bring (pen/pencil, notebook, etc.)
  - Is lunch being provided? Or do students need to bring their own/money?
  - Time you will be arriving at and departing from the college
  - Time you anticipate returning to the school
  - Dismissal procedure once students return from visit]

## The Basics

Use the college website to answer each of the following questions.

**Name of college:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many students attend the college?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the minimum GPA (grade point average) requirement for admission?  
(If there's no minimum GPA, write "none.")

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the minimum SAT or ACT score for admission?  
(If the college doesn't require the SAT or ACT, write "not required.")

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What is the cost to attend the college for one academic year (including tuition, room and board, orientation, fees, books, and other supplies)?  
(Note: if the website lists tuition only, write "tuition only" and the amount.)

\_\_\_\_\_

5. **BONUS:** What types of scholarships and financial aid does the college offer?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

A college visit can be very revealing. Take notes to keep track of key points.



## College Visit Planner

Answer questions in the NOTES column during the college visit.  
Add your own questions in the empty spaces at the bottom of the last page.

Name of college: \_\_\_\_\_

Date visited: \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTIONS	NOTES
<b>STUDENTS</b>	
<p><b>Take a campus tour.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How diverse are the students?</li> <li>• How are they dressed? Are they approachable?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Talk to the students.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did they choose this school?</li> <li>• What do they like about it?</li> <li>• What's one thing they would change?</li> </ul>	
<b>CAMPUS FACILITIES</b>	
<p><b>Visit a dorm.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are freshman roommates chosen?</li> <li>• Does the college provide housing for all four years?</li> <li>• Are the dorms quiet enough for studying?</li> <li>• Is it comfortable? Uncomfortable? Explain.</li> <li>• Could you imagine living here?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Eat in the dining facility.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of dining facilities are on campus?</li> <li>• How is the food?</li> <li>• Can they meet your dietary restrictions (e.g., vegetarian, kosher)?</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Visit activity centers, athletic and recreational facilities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of facilities are on campus?</li> <li>• What recreational activities exist?</li> <li>• Are there studios for art, computers, dance, etc.?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Visit the library.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do students study there, or just use it for research?</li> <li>• Are there computers, copy machines, etc.?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Visit the health center.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What health services does the college offer?</li> <li>• Do students find the health services helpful? Why or why not?</li> <li>• Is there a doctor and/or nurse available on campus?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Talk to a career counselor.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the school assist students in finding work after college?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Find out about accessibility for special needs.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What services are there for students with special needs?</li> <li>• Is the campus wheelchair accessible?</li> <li>• What kinds of services are there for the visually and hearing impaired?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Talk to students about safety on campus.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there security in the dorms?</li> <li>• Are there security measures on campus for students walking around at night?</li> </ul>	

<b>Academics/Faculty</b>	
<p><b>Sit in on a class.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many students are in a lecture class?</li> <li>• Is the professor/teacher engaging?</li> <li>• Are students actively involved?</li> <li>• What did you like best about the class? Least?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Talk to faculty members (professors or others).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which programs is this school known for?</li> <li>• What is the most popular major?</li> <li>• Do professors teach most courses, or are they taught by teaching assistants?</li> <li>• How hard or easy is it to arrange time to talk to professors?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Visit studios or labs (art studio, computer lab, TV production facilities).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the lab, studio, etc. have up-to-date equipment?</li> <li>• Are there knowledgeable people to provide assistance?</li> <li>• What are the hours of the lab, studio, etc.?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Talk to someone in the registrar's office.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How difficult is it to change your major?</li> <li>• Is there a student advisory program and how does it work?</li> <li>• How does freshman registration work? Will you get the classes you want?</li> </ul>	

<b>Social Activities</b>	
<p><b>Talk to the students.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you do for fun?</li> <li>• What do you do on the weekend?</li> <li>• How important are fraternities and sororities to the social life on campus?</li> <li>• What role do team sports play in the social life here?</li> <li>• What extracurricular activities are there?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Read the school newspaper and check out bulletin boards around campus.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of events are happening (e.g., concerts, shows, etc.)?</li> </ul>	
<b>Off-Campus Community</b>	
<p><b>Walk around the community, town, or city.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of cultural centers (i.e., museums, theaters) are there?</li> <li>• How can I get into town from campus?</li> <li>• How can I get around town?</li> </ul>	
<b>More Questions</b>	

ADAPTED FROM: collegeboard.com “Campus Visit Checklist;” [Campus Visits & College Interviews](#) by Zola Dincin Schneider, The College Board, 2002; and [guidancecounselor.com](#) “Questions to Ask.”