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Parent Conversation Starter: College Search Guide

School Size

When navigating conversations about the sizes of the colleges and universities your student considers, remember school size can be associated with college stereotypes that may or may not be true. Not every large-population school has a rich campus life, and not every small college focuses on the liberal arts.

Help your student think through the size factor critically by asking these questions:

- What about the size of this school appeals to you?
 - How do you feel about the school's or program's average class size?
 - Do you prefer lecture- or discussion-style classes?
 - What size dormitory building do you see yourself in your first year?
 - What career placement rates and professional connections does the school offer?
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Distance from Home

Students and family members may not have the same preferred distance from home, so it's essential to talk through the pros and cons throughout your college search. As you discuss your student's desires, add your own distance factors to process the options wisely over time.

Out-of-State Factors	In-State Factors
More opportunities to go outside of comfort zone	Comfort of learning and growing in a familiar area
Greater independence	Independence of college life with easier access to home when needed
Loss of any in-state grants or scholarships	Access to any state grants and scholarships at state school tuition rates
Potential financial aid opportunities specific to out-of-state students, depending on the school*	Closer proximity to any local scholarships received to assist with renewals and reporting on progress
Expansion of future professional network	Ability to strengthen professional network close to home
Travel costs	More affordable access to home

Admission Requirements

As admission requirements can quickly rule out—or in—your student’s options, talk through this topic early on in your student’s search. Talk realistically together, and encourage your student in their interests. As they start weighing their options, your student may doubt their own abilities or invest all their hopes in one school. Remind them to pursue schools with a range of admission requirements, including aspirational schools and schools they safely meet all requirements for—all of which should offer a program that fits their interests.

When comparing multiple schools’ admission requirements, consider using and adapting this worksheet to your student’s needs. Additional fields might include merit-based scholarship requirements, honors program requirements, and early application deadlines.* This worksheet can help your student fully understand their choices and build excitement around their realistic options.

	School 1	School 2	School 3
GPA			
SAT			
ACT			
Essay Required?			
Program Name			
Program-Specific Requirements			
Application Deadline			
Estimated Response Date			

* [How to Apply to UA](#)

Programs and Majors Available

If your student already has specific career goals, show your support by encouraging their interests and helping them compare programs across schools.

Regardless of your student's current interests, help them keep their options open by looking at the full range of majors and the academic approach a school offers. If interests change over time, being at a school that provides a well-rounded education and transferrable skills can ease that transition.

Find out how many credit hours the major requires (outside of general education requirements). While more extensive program-specific requirements can indicate a higher level of rigor, they can also make it more difficult for your student to switch majors during their second, or even first, year of college and graduate according to the original timeline. Help your student find schools that require **a healthy balance of program-specific courses and general education courses**—particularly general education courses that would be beneficial to a variety of majors and/or your student's professional development.

[Explore UA Undergraduate Majors](#)

Tuition and Costs

When considering your student's options, remind yourself and your student that the tuition and costs each school lists are often off-set by [financial aid](#) from the federal and state governments, and even the school itself. Help your student remain realistic about your total budget, and know that you'll need to wait to receive a personalized financial package from each school your student is accepted to before fully understanding the total costs.

Setting budget expectations early can ease the decision-making process when you and your student do receive all the information you need. Start talking through financial details with your student to help both of you brainstorm the financial questions you need answered.

[UA Tuition & Fees](#)

Housing Options

Above all, your student should feel safe and connected in their college housing. Find out what else your student may be looking for by asking these questions:

- How do you envision your first residence hall or apartment?
- How do you feel about having a roommate?
- What are you most excited and/or anxious about when you think about moving into a new space?

These questions may help dig into the deeper needs your student may have regarding their first college living experience—and point you to what should matter most when asking housing questions and touring your options.

[Find Your Housing Fit](#)

Campus Facilities

Is your student seriously considering a highly **technical or research-based program**? Are they most excited about the **community** they will build at college? Are they looking for a specific **classroom experience**?

Knowing these details about your student's interests can help you guide them toward schools and programs that offer what they're looking for. Help your student understand the importance of cutting-edge labs, community spaces, and learning environments by talking through the potential outcomes and requesting to visit these spaces during your campus tours.

If they matter to your student, the labs, classrooms, or community spaces could be the deciding factor between two schools with similar programs and financial packages; don't underestimate the power of the facilities your student will be using every day.

[Resource: Research Facilities & Opportunities at UA](#)

Campus Activities

While academics should take precedence over extracurriculars, campus activities are often where students build life-long relationships that help them succeed throughout college, their career, and personal challenges.

Consider your student's current extracurriculars, and talk through which activities matter to them most, or how they envision their life evolving in college. Help them consider campus life in their decision-making process by inquiring about the student organizations available and the general campus culture. Encourage your student to talk with current college freshmen and sophomores about their involvement in areas of shared interest. This will help them see the specifics behind campus life statements and picture where they'd thrive best.

[Resource: Campus Life at UA](#)

Campus Visit Experience

With the campus visit often being where your first powerful in-person impression of a school is made, encourage your student to go prepared. Whether they're excited or hesitant, having a checklist can help you each stay on top of what's important during the whirlwind of a tour, interview, or overnight experience. Build your own checklist or list of questions, keeping in mind the following:

- Campus life questions for conversations with current students
- Academic program questions for meetings with professors
- General decision-making questions for admissions advisors
- Financial questions for financial aid advisors
- Residence hall features and questions
- Dining hall features and questions
- Campus characteristics and general impressions
- Follow-up questions

[Resource: UA Visit Days & Campus Tours](#)

Ready to start the conversation? [Send this survey to your student](#) and compare the order of your results.