



Five Great College Search Tips from Independent Educational Consultants

From researching schools to [planning campus visits](#) to submitting applications, it can feel sometimes like there are a thousand small steps to take in the college search. That's why high school students and parents are always on the lookout for good advice.

Well, look no further. Go See Campus has collected the best tips from independent educational consultants and presented them here for you.

What are Independent Educational Consultants?

For those who are unfamiliar, independent educational consultants (IECs) are professionals in private practice who assist students in college admissions. Most have experience working in high schools or in college offices.

IECs support families in several ways. They:

- Help students choose high school class loads.
- Identify colleges that match a student's interest.
- Advise students as they complete college applications.
- Offer standardized test preparation.
- Suggest sources of financial aid.

Go See Campus recommends that students and parents choose IECs with the appropriate background, education, and training. The [Independent Educational Consultants Association \(IECA\)](#) is an organization that bases membership on set criteria, including schooling, experience, peer references, and adherence to ethical guidelines. You can learn more about [IECA on its website](#) as well as [search for independent educational consultants near you](#).

About the College Search Tips

Go See Campus received responses from IECs to a deceptively simple question: "If you had only one piece of college search advice to give to a high school student, what would it be?" We allowed room for elaboration and other advice. Then, we broke these responses down into some basic ideas. Go See Campus suggests that you deep-dive into quotations from the IECs to find out tactics you can use in your own search.

Now, with no further delay, here are five helpful college search tips from independent educational consultants...



1. Start your search with an open mind

Every student and parent begins the college search with opinions about what schools are "best." As a result, they might ignore some great options for college. The IECs in our article urged students to be open to new possibilities.

Block out the comments of others and remove the messages you have received about various schools. Look at each school through your own eyes and decide whether it will be a good "fit" for you. - Dori Middlebrook (Dori Middlebrook Educational Consulting, Encinitas, CA)

Have eight "first" choices. Well, the number doesn't have to be eight and they don't really have to be absolutely your first choice. The idea is to be sure that all of the colleges to which you apply are ones that you would be happy to attend. - Sally Springer (Springer Educational Consulting, Davis, CA)

Before you step foot on campus, do a little soul searching. I know, sounds corny, right? But being prepared before you start touring colleges will give you a better idea of what you're really looking for. Figure out what interests you, what your goals are, and where you want to be when you graduate from college. - Brooke Daly (Advantage College Planning, Raleigh, NC)

Don't just look at popular, prestigious, or big-name schools. Start early and take the time to look at the best match for you. - Elaine Ehlers (Durango College Consulting, Durango, CO)

Read the mission statement for each college on your list. Does it match with your own personal views and goals? - Robyn Moreth (RTM College Consulting, Arlington Heights, IL)

Keep an open mind before you shut the door to future possibilities. This means giving each college the attention it deserves by exploring all print material and online resources. And if you are at all intrigued, visit! - Kiersten Murphy (Murphy College Consultants, Issaquah and Seattle, WA)

No high school student (or counselor for that matter) can name every one of the nearly 4,000 colleges in the U.S. and Canada, so don't shy away from a school you haven't heard of before. I've discovered the coolest programs and campus features while visiting little-known schools... like 'The Plan' at Marlboro or the Rock-Paper-Scissors Club at Florida Southern. - Kristina Dooley (Estrela Consulting)



2. Choose a College That Fits You

There are a lot of factors that can affect a college decision. "What do my family and friends think about it?" "Is it in an area of the country in which I want to live?" "Does it serve waffles AND pancakes in the cafeteria?" However, none should outweigh whether the college will deliver what a student wants out of higher education. The educational consultants had this to say.

Find schools where you will be educationally successful and socially happy. - Marilyn Emerson (College Planning Services, Inc., New York, NY)

Choose a college based on what YOU desire in a school and on what fits your personality and learning style best. Forget about what your friends think. Remember that college is what you make it, and prestige should not be the decision-maker. - Calli Christenson, Recent IECA Summer Training Institute Attendee (CLC College Prep Services, Lubbock, TX)

When someone offers an opinion of a college, whether good or bad, try to find out what's behind it. Get to the facts, and then see how those facts fit with your own needs. - Sally Springer (Springer Educational Consulting, Davis, CA)

It's easy to end up with the same college list that your friends have and applying to the colleges that are local, or well-known, or the ones that you talk about with family and friends. Challenge yourself to keep an open mind, discover new colleges and give yourself more options! You never know, you may fall in love! - Brooke Daly (Advantage College Planning, Raleigh, NC)

Make sure you like all of the colleges you are applying to. Many students end up attending their safety colleges. - Todd Johnson (College Admissions Partners, Minnetonka, MN)

Don't just concentrate on researching your "reach" schools. Spend a significant amount of time seriously researching more probable options. - Robyn Moreth (RTM College Consulting, Arlington Heights, IL)

Apply to all of your colleges before Thanksgiving of your senior year and apply to rolling admissions colleges as soon as applications are available. That way you will have eliminated much of the last minute stress and stand a chance of being admitted to one or more schools. - Francine Schwartz (Pathfinder Counseling LLC, East Lyme, CT)



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3. Visit colleges early and often

Go See Campus is a big supporter of making visits to colleges. It turns out that educational consultants are, too.

Don't be limited by geography. Even though you think you have no desire to go to college close to home, visit local schools if you don't have the time, money or incentive to venture further right away. Visiting schools by type rather than specific fit will help you get a sense of what it is you are looking for. - Ginger Fay (Fay College Counseling, Washington, DC)

During your freshmen and sophomore years, you can explore the different types of colleges and universities in your immediate area to determine what feels right. You can consider your high school curriculum options and how they might impact college choices. Starting early allows you time to process the information and to review material in-depth. - Kiersten Murphy (Murphy College Consultants, Issaquah and Seattle, WA)

There is only so much you can get from reading websites, books, and social media sites. A visit while the college is in session gives you a real look into the culture of a school and if you think you can call it home for the next four years of your life! - Judy Zodda (Zodda College Services, Framingham, MA)

Visit prospective colleges whenever possible. An area's "mores"—its specific customs, weather patterns, the pace of life, and even language and speech patterns—contribute to the culture in different parts of the country. Students need to consider their personal comfort level: are they open to differences or do they prefer the familiar? - Marilyn Emerson (College Planning Services, Inc., New York, NY)



4. When you visit a college, take time to experience the campus.

If all you are doing when you visit a campus is taking a tour and snapping pictures, you may be missing out on some important experiences. The educational consultants offer advice on making the most of time at colleges.

Visit college campuses, either informally (like stopping for ice cream made from the cows in the vet school program) or formally (sign up for the tour, info session and interview at a favorite school in the fall of senior year) whenever the opportunity arises. - Ginger Fay (Fay College Counseling, Washington, DC)

Any school can look and sound fabulous on paper or the internet. You will never know if it is the right school for you if you don't visit the campus, see the students, check out the environment, and explore the philosophy. Ask your parents how many times they have reserved a hotel based on internet photos and been extremely surprised when they arrived at how different it is in person. - Dori Middlebrook (Dori Middlebrook Educational Consulting, Encinitas, CA)

If you have a specific interest, arrange to meet with a professor in the department / major in which you think you are interested. Ask about anything that is not published on their website, such as opportunities for undergrad research, taking courses in their department if you are not a major in that department (such as music), and why they think their department is superior over the same department at colleges similar to them. - Judy Zodda (Zodda College Services, Framingham, MA)

Take the tour and speak to faculty in the department you are interested in as well as current students. Go to the library, bookstore, eat in the cafeteria. Remember, you are shopping for the college experience that you are going to be paying dearly for. - Elaine Ehlers (Durango College Consulting, Durango, CO)

A campus tour is good, but if you get the opportunity to stay overnight in the dorms and really interact with current students, you'll have a pretty good feel for campus (and know whether or not it's a good fit for you) when you leave. - Calli Christenson, Recent IECA Summer Training Institute Attendee (CLC College Prep Services, Lubbock, TX)



5. Explore a variety of options to afford college

The cost of higher education continues to rise. The independent educational consultants recommend flexibility, negotiating with colleges about financial aid, and researching alternative sources of funding.

There is a college for every student that has the desire and motivation to attend college and a way to pay for a college education. - Francine Schwartz (Pathfinder Counseling LLC, East Lyme, CT)

The best deals in colleges go to those who understand financial aid. Ask:

- What percent of need does the college cover?
- How is need determined?
- Does the college offer merit based awards?
- What does a student need to do to get one of those awards and how much money might they receive?

Do the research to understand how college financial aid works and you can be the student who gets the best "deal" at a great college for you. - Todd Johnson (College Admissions Partners, Minnetonka, MN)

Students need to consider long-term how their school choice will affect their lives. I believe it's a wise decision to apply, gain admission, and then defer the offer until the next year if the reason is solely financial. This lets the school know that you're serious. Who knows? You may get a summer call letting you know of some aid that has been freed up! - Kristina Dooley (Estrela Consulting)

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