



COLLEGE PLANNING



Choosing The College That's Right For You

(NAPSA)—Admissions experts say that selecting a college ultimately comes down to finding a school that's the right fit. That's one reason why visiting a campus is so important—it's the best way to evaluate whether a university is well suited to your needs.

Visit a campus and speak with professors and students, sit in on classes, tour the facilities and gain a sense of the campus community. "When you visit, be sure to take some notes, but you may also consider bringing a camera to snap a few shots to refresh your memory once you are back home after a visit," says Bruce Gardiner, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa.

Try these additional tips for choosing the right school:

- **Narrow Down Choices**—Ask yourself some basic questions. For example, some items to consider include campus size (big or small), location (urban or rural), as well as campus life, academic programs, extracurricular activities, etc. "Think about the basic criteria of your search. Deciding what features of a school are most important can help you narrow your search," says Gardiner.

- **Search Tools**—Once you've begun to narrow your search, hop online. "Individual college Web sites such as Lehigh's (www.lehigh.edu/admissions) are a wealth of information for details about the college and the admissions process," says Gardiner. "You may also want to check out CollegeBoard.com, which offers a free 'College MatchMaker' search tool that helps you identify possible schools based on some basic criteria."

- **Get Organized**—Are you going to take the SATs, ACTs or SAT Sub-



Visiting a campus in person is an important first step in finding the college or university that best suits your needs.

ject Tests? What are the deadlines for these tests? Also, some schools may not require SATs. "Often, students will take standardized tests such as the PSAT as early as their sophomore year so they can benchmark what schools may be a fit from an academic rigor perspective," says Gardiner.

It's also important to talk with a guidance counselor. He or she can help familiarize you with your chosen school's application process. In addition, identify a few teachers you can ask to write recommendations. Be sure to touch base with the teachers well in advance of the deadlines. That way, they'll have plenty of time to write and you'll have plenty of time to understand what they may want from you.

No matter what kind of school you're looking for, Gardiner says it's critical that students take ownership of their college search. "Going through the motions and relying on someone else, like your parents or guidance counselors, to make all your decisions is a recipe for you landing someplace that is not a good fit in the long term. It's really important that you play an active role in finding someplace that is right for you."