

Educating Yourself On Higher Education

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Today's educational environment is much more competitive than when I was applying to college. Today's students are more committed academically, focused on giving back to their communities and involved in more extra-curricular activities. It is more important than ever for them to distinguish themselves with demonstrated leadership, unique skills and real world experiences.

Given the cost of higher education today in terms of both time and money, it is incumbent upon both students and their families to become educated consumers. Also, they need to understand how their educational decisions and career choices will impact their job satisfaction, quality of life and income goals.

Students can research careers on the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook at www.bls.gov. The handbook will provide information pertaining to median pay, job outlook, work environment, required education and a description of the position being researched.

And, while parents should encourage their children's dreams, we also need to educate them regarding the economic realities of life. If their goal is to major in dance and become a star on Broadway, we might suggest getting a minor in business as well. This way, they would also possess the knowledge to open a dance studio just in case Broadway does not pan out.

In the past, the last place students would visit is now the first place they should visit today – the school's career center. It is imperative for them to understand how well the career center does at placement for their selected career or field of study. Some things to consider include: industry placement rate, quality of

companies interviewing on campus, size of companies interviewing on campus, starting salaries, and a proven track record of alumni advancing in their careers. Speaking of alumni, how involved are they with the school? Does the school have a vibrant alumni network? Do they come back to support the school and provide networking opportunities for the students?

When researching a specific school, you should determine what merit-based aid may be available. www.collegedata.com is a great resource for admissions and financial aid information. It provides information on colleges' required courses, average GPA and average required SAT scores. In addition, it provides average merit and need-based aid along with average indebtedness.

All colleges and universities have a Net Price Calculator. This calculator will tell you what the average student is paying to attend that school. You can also enter your own financial data to determine what you should expect to pay to attend that specific school.

Higher education today is a big investment in terms of time and money. It makes sense for students and their families to spend more of their time up front to select the right school that balances cost, quality of education, life experience, proper support services and career opportunities. The right decision will have a tremendous impact on our future graduates' career success, quality of life and financial independence.

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