WHERE TO GO? A TOP TEN LIST FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS TO CONSIDER WHEN MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT COLLEGE

College decision-making time is at hand for some; others are now visiting campuses. Admissions experts from Baruch College, a senior college in the City University of New York, offer some tips to help parents cope with the stress of guiding their child through that all-important question: Where should I go to college?

Academics:

1. Remember why your child is going to college in the first place – Now is the time for your child to reflect on what they truly want. Compare their preferences and ambitions to the resources that each school offers. Consider each school’s academics, study abroad programs, student life, extracurricular activities, career services, internship programs, etc., and ask how it will further your child’s educational and career goals. Reassure your child that it’s okay to be uncertain about their career ambitions but, if they are, a college with flexible academic programs and multiple options is probably a good bet.

2. What happens to people who graduate from this school? – Look into what most of the graduates of the schools your child likes wind up doing. If your child is interested in the fine arts, and the majority of students at a particular school end up working in the financial industry, it should give you both pause.

3. The downside of high school success – Sometimes, even a top-performing high school student is surprised by the rigorous demands of college courses and professors. Even if your child was accepted at the school of their dreams, they need to understand that they’re starting all over once they get to college; their sterling SAT scores won’t matter if they skip class or studying. Have an honest conversation with your child about the level of commitment required at the schools they like and make sure they’re prepared for it.

It’s (almost) all about the money:

4. Factor college tuition into family budgeting – Try plugging the estimated cost of attendance (tuition, room and board, books, transportation, student fees) for each school at which your child is accepted into your family's budget. This will provide you with a better long-term financial plan. And don’t forget about graduate school, if that is in your child’s plans; it’ll be upon you both before you know it.

5. Explore all avenues of financing — Don’t count solely on the college’s financial aid award for help. Learn about scholarships being offered by local businesses, community organizations and employers; your family could qualify for additional aid monies.
6. Get to know your school's financial aid team – Most financial aid departments offer free workshops on how to plan for the cost of attending college. Take advantage of such sessions, and don’t be bashful; ask as many questions as occur to you. Now is the best time to consider all your options.

Campus and residential life:

7. What’s new at that school? – It’s been several months since you and your child did all that college research. Go back on the colleges’ websites and see what’s up! Schools may be offering new programs, hosting unique events on campus, renovating facilities or announcing new faculty appointments—any of which could affect your child’s decision.

8. Finding the right fit – Every school has a personality; you don’t want to spend thousands of dollars on one that clashes with your child’s. Visit the campus again (or for the first time if you haven’t been yet!). Encourage your child to attend an accepted student reception; sit in on a class; go to a sporting event; and talk to current students—without you hovering in the background! Students will speak candidly to each other about real-life college issues like the social scene, academic pressures and drinking on campus—all things your child should be aware of in advance.

9. Safety first – Let’s face it: sending your child off to college is scary enough without worrying about crime. Take note of a school’s location and ask college officials about security: Is there a 24-hour security team? What kind of campus alert systems are in place? What are the crime statistics for the area? What security precautions exist in the residence halls? While you’re asking questions, explore the college’s mental health and counseling services—college can be stressful for kids as well as parents.

Coping:

10. Breathe deeply and stay calm – Make clear to your child that you are available to talk things through, weigh the pros and cons, ask questions and visit campuses with them but that, ultimately, the decision about where to go to college must be theirs. It’s hard—for both of you—to hand over the keys to their future, but when you watch them receive their diploma, you’ll realize it was well worth it.