

Mining for Gold on College Websites

(From CollegeData.com)

Want to quickly dig up great information about a college? Get smart about checking out the college website. Not only can you find basic facts about applying for admission, but you may be able to take a virtual tour, explore the social scene, check out the faculty, and even read the student newspaper.

Start with These Links

Admissions/prospective students. Most college websites have a section—or even a separate website—for potential students. Here you can find out how to apply (often online), get visiting and travel information, set up a campus visit, attend an information session, and get statistics on the last admitted class. Many of the other links you should look at may be listed here. If you are thinking of visiting, take a look at the special events calendar. The college may host special events for potential applicants. On the other hand there are times to avoid, such as finals week.

Financial aid. Here you can find out the process for applying for financial aid and scholarships. You can find out about college scholarships, deadlines, application process, any required documents, and how the college determines eligibility for aid.

Catalog. Many colleges publish an online catalog that describes the majors they offer, the requirements to graduate in that major, the courses offered, and much more information about their academic programs. If you have a major in mind you can find out just how robust their program is and what the prerequisite classes are. If you don't have a major yet, you can get a good feel for the breadth of academic programs the school offers. If the catalog is not online, you can usually order a copy from the college while you are on their website.

Departments and majors. Most colleges have web pages and even whole websites devoted to academic departments. You can learn about the faculty, current research projects, support services offered, course requirements, and even financial aid targeted at majors in that field.

Student services. All college offer support for their students. Information about these services will give you a good feel for how well the college might treat you once you are there. Look for information about health care, technology, counseling, tutoring, and career support. You should also find descriptions of on-campus housing and residential life.

Contact. Knowing how to contact admissions and financial aid staff help can be a big help if you decide to apply. Most contact links are visibly displayed, but if not, look

lower. Often phone numbers and email addresses are lurking at the bottom of the page. You may also find useful items for visitors, such as a campus map and tour information.

Look for Less Obvious but Revealing Links

The college's mission statement. While mission statements can seem similar, they can reveal subtle differences among colleges. For example, one mission may aim to educate students for responsible leadership in government and the professions. Another might aim to provide a broad liberal arts background supported by spiritual values.

Student newspapers and campus publications. Opinions from current students can tell you a lot about the campus politics, social life, values, and especially humor.

New students. Sections devoted to incoming freshmen can give you an idea of how the college welcomes its newest students.

Diverse communities. From race to sexual orientation, you can find out how the college enriches its culture by supporting diverse campus communities.

Surrounding community. Many college sites have links and information about the surrounding town and area.

Activities and organizations. Official and unofficial student groups can range from religious to political to just plain silly. These are great ways to meet other students who share your interests. They can also tell you something about the values and interests of the students. Here you may be able to explore the Greek system of fraternities and sororities and the process for joining. You may find groups based on future career choices, such as law and medicine. Special events unique to the campus may be highlighted.

Alumni. What do graduates do with their lives? Do you identify with their stories?

The arts. Even if you do not possess a single creative bone, attending performances from fine art to theater to music enriches your college experience. If you are an aspiring artist you can see what opportunities there are for theater, dance, music, and more.

Library. That's right, the library. Chances are you are going to spend some time in one. A well-stocked and organized library can be a tremendous boon to your studies.

Sports and recreation. From rock climbing to folk dancing to soccer, a roster of challenging experiences offers great options to relax and meet people. You aren't going to spend all your time studying! You can find out about the college teams, booster clubs, and club and intramural sports. Game calendars and contact information for coaches may be also be available here.

News. Press releases and news stories can tell you what makes the college stand out and what it values.

About the college. Colleges are eager to tell you about themselves. In many cases you can take a virtual online tour, find out the history of the college, even learn about the local weather.

Volunteering. Many college students report that volunteer work and internships are among their most meaningful college experiences. Find out what the college has to offer.

Study abroad. Want to combine study with international experience? You are not alone. Many colleges have robust study abroad programs ranging from a few weeks to a full year.

Employment. The financial aid office is not the only source of part-time work. See if the college has a job placement office and check out the possibilities.

Search tools. Look for search tools and search windows to make your investigation easier. Locating the website's site map can also make it easy to find links fast.

Unusual links. Look for interesting and unique links that tell you something about the character of the college. For example University of Texas at Austin has a link to the "Union Underground", which provides recreational opportunities seven days and nights a week.

The college website contains a wealth of information to get you started on your college research. You just need to know where to find it!