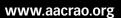## Beyond This Brochure

This guide gives you the basic questions to ask about information technology. You can find other useful tips and data, including comparative information on specific technology issues for different types of colleges and universities, on the guide's Web site:

www.educause.edu/studentguide/

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The Student Guide to Evaluating Information Technology on Campus

What you need to know and what you should ask when choosing a college or university

Technology, learning, and you

You're not just a student, you're a consumer too…

Wherever you go to school and whatever you choose as a major or future career, you'll be using computers and other information technologies. It makes sense to check out the technology environment at the schools you're considering along with other factors that will influence your choice.

How will you be using technology—in your degree program, in particular classes, in labs, in teams, in field work, and where you live? These are just some of the questions that this guide will help you ask.

*Should you buy a computer
or use those provided on campus?*

Can you find a computer at 2:00 a.m. if you need one?

*Is the Internet easy to connect to
around the campus?*

*Are there wireless connections
on campus?*

*Will you have to pay a technology
fee in addition to tuition?*

*What technology training
is available?*

What about legal file sharing and music and video downloading?

Even if you're undecided now about a program or a career, you'll be a learner, a discoverer, and a technology consumer at your school. Spend a little time learning how information technology will make a difference at your school and in your future.

…and should know what you're paying for, so ask!

In searching for the right college or university, you'll find all kinds of guides, lists, and rankings designed to help and influence your choice, along with print and Web resources that schools are glad to send you.

Computers are everywhere and will be a big part of your college experience. While a campus's technology resources, support, and services will not be the only factors you consider, they are important, variable, and too often misunderstood.

One of the best tactics is to ask questions. Remember, there are no "dumb" questions, just those you want answers to before you make a commitment.

Active learning with technology: bringing students, faculty, and information together

You will be joining a community of people devoted to creating and sharing information—activities that can be enhanced by information technology. Finding answers to the following questions can help you understand how technology is used to support learning and collaboration in your areas of interest or possible major(s).

Coursework—in and out of class

- How does the campus use technology to enhance teaching, learning, and access to information in your areas of interest? Examples include online syllabi, Web-based discussion groups and project teams, and electronic portfolios.

- Are classrooms technology-enhanced?

- In both introductory and specialized courses, what opportunities are there for you to collaborate with other students using technology on project teams?

- Does the school give credit for courses taken electronically (online/at a distance) from other institutions and sources of instruction?

Support services

- How does the campus provide access for students to work with multimedia (audio and video)?

- Are library collections and resources—such as catalogs, research databases, special collections, course reserves, full-text electronic journals, books, and streaming media—available online and accessible off-campus?

- Can the library deliver documents to you electronically, either via e-mail or through Web posting? Does the library charge a fee when information resources that you need are not available in its collections?

- Does the library provide research assistance in a variety of ways, such as in person, by phone, by e-mail, and through Web services? When are these forms of assistance available?

Looking toward graduation and a career

- Does the campus offer general or profession-specific training programs that will ensure you are fluent in current information technologies when you graduate?

Taking care of business online

Your campus experience will include some time spent taking care of practical matters, such as registering for classes, requesting transcripts, and paying tuition. Find out which transactions and the services that support them can be handled online and at a distance.

Managing your personal information

- What personal information can you view online—your contact information, grades, degree progress, financial status, or other information?

- Can you update any of this information online yourself?

Conducting business

- Which of the following can you do online?
  - check admissions status
  - pay bills
  - apply for and view financial aid awards
  - register for, add, and drop courses
  - learn course grades (online or by phone)
  - view and print unofficial transcripts
  - check progress toward completion of degree requirements
  - make campus bookstore purchases
  - other

- What campus and community services are covered by debit-card, smart-card, or one-card systems?

- Are the school catalog—including course descriptions, degree requirements, and academic policies—and the semester/term schedule of classes available on the Web?

Privacy, security, and usage rules

- What security and privacy policies are in place to protect student information?

- How does the campus protect students from identity theft?

- How does the campus notify students of their rights under the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)?

- Is network bandwidth limited for peer-to-peer software, gaming, Web cams, or other programs requiring high levels of network resources? Are Web pages filtered?

- Is there a campus code of behavior about using computer resources?

- Does the campus have policies addressing peer-to-peer file sharing, virus software, and copyright?

- How does the campus manage e-mail spam?

Enriching your extracurricular experiences with technology

Whether you will be a full- or part-time student, living on campus or commuting, the school's social, extra-curricular, and career services activities will be an important part of your educational experience. Find out about the technology tools that facillitate different communities on campus, allowing for communication, personal development, and getting together (in person and virtually).

Accessing computer services

◗ What public access for computing is available to students? Examples include computing labs, cyber cafés, residence hall computers, and wireless access.

◗ Does the campus provide institutional e-mail accounts for all students and use e-mail as an official medium of communication?

◗ Does the campus provide and support electronic space for personal student Web pages?

Connecting with others

◗ Is contact information for students, faculty, and staff readily accessible electronically?

◗ What social activities and services are available online?

◗ Are there Web sites for student organizations and clubs?

◗ Does the campus make available online discussion forums or bulletin boards for un-moderated use?

◗ What technology-supported career-planning services are available for students?

What you pay for and what you get

There is a strong connection between the quality of technology services and the associated costs. There is also a wide variation in the ways campuses charge for these services. To evaluate the benefits you will receive and to compare costs, you'll need answers to these questions.

Fees and expenses

◗ What, if any, technology fee is charged by the campus? What does it cover?

◗ Will you be required to purchase your own computer?

◗ Does the campus make computing and network access financially accessible? Is special student pricing offered for computers and peripheral equipment?

◗ Does the campus assess extra fees for network connections in residence hall rooms or for off-campus access?

Technical support

◗ What hardware and software standards, if any, does the campus require, recommend, and/or support?

◗ What kinds of services (help desk, training, trouble-shooting) are provided by the campus, and when are they available?

◗ Does the campus have a plan for keeping its hardware and software current, and if so, what is the replacement cycle?

◗ If you bring your own computer to school, what kind of technical support can you expect from the campus?

Other services

◗ How does the campus support printing for students, and is there a charge for this service?

◗ Does the campus provide wireless network coverage? If so, how much of the campus has wireless connectivity?