Crabby is your college research adviser

Crabby Office Lady

Getting ready for college can be exhilarating and also petrifying. Whether you're 18 or 80, some diligent research can go a long way.

If you're a high school student, you may be reading this while you're on your winter break. And if I know your parents, they're haranguing you about getting started on your college research. (Now that you're almost a grown-up, the fun is just beginning....)

See, I've been there before, and it wasn't so long ago that I've completely forgotten the stress of taking those standardized tests with those standardized #2 pencils in those standardized stinky old classrooms, wondering where in the heck you'll be at this time next year.

But you know (and this is painful to say), your parents are right. Now's the time to get crackin' if you want to be organized about this. (If you don't and want to end up living in your parents' rec room for the rest of your life, well, honey, here is the first lesson of this column: Life is all about the choices we make.)

Glad you decided to keep reading. As with any project, having a clear plan is key. When it comes to scrutinizing the colleges, narrowing your choices, and making final preparations, Crabby is here to hold your hand, give you some ideas, and then set you free.

Make the most of your research

You'll probably want to know that you did all you could to research your final choice. The various programs in Office, along with our most excellent Office templates, can help you to figure out which school best suits your needs, who your contacts are, and what the important dates are to keep in mind (being late to an interview with the dean isn't a great way to start your college career).

Here are some ideas to help you get started. Once you get going, you'll probably figure out other ways to make your research even more useful and fruitful. (You're just that kind of person.)

OFFICE PROGRAM	IDEAS	MAKING IT HAPPEN IN OFFICE
Excel	Create a worksheet listing the schools you've applied to, what they offer, and what they require of you.	Template: College comparison worksheet Template: College costs calculator
Word	Create a professional-looking resume, letter of introduction, and admissions essay. Write the admissions office asking for an application or a tour of the campus.	Template: Request for college application materials Template: Request for application or information on school Template: Request for academic department information
OneNote	Figure out a way to keep track of the various schools you're interested in and what you know about them. School catalogs are a place to start, but rather than trying to hunt through each individual catalog every time you need to look at a piece of information, it's a lot easier to pull the information that you want and put it all in one place: your OneNote notebook.	Create separate folders for notes you'll be taking about each school that you're considering. Within each folder create sections that highlight academics, costs, location, and other considerations. And from within each section get really detailed: Link to each school's Web site, keep information about admission personnel, and even insert meeting

		details from an Outlook meeting request you've set up with your guidance counselor, an admissions person, or a dean.
Outlook	E-mail is a great way to stay in touch with advisors, deans, admissions folks, and financial institutions.	Use the Calendar to keep track of important dates such as deadlines for applications and financial documents, dates of campus visits, the orientation schedule, and the first day of classes.
		Use the Contacts list to organize contact information for the schools you're researching: names, admissions mailing addresses, and telephone numbers of important contacts such as freshman advisors, campus tour guides, and alumni.
FrontPage	Create a Web site that can act as your spokesperson online. Post a resume, lists of honors and extracurricular activities, and even a photo gallery of your travels and community volunteer projects.	Article: About creating and designing Web pages Article: Display a gallery of photos on your Web site Office demo: Dull Web site? Brighten with interactive buttons
Office Marketplace	The Office Marketplace is a great place to get third-party downloads, templates, Web services, and other products. If you need to fax a resume or letter, this is the place to find the service that can help you do that. If you need some serious help with a fancy-schmancy Web site, the Marketplace is also the place to go. And if you're going to be sending out a lot of information to a lot of different schools, perhaps a mailing service is what you need.	Marketplace listings: Faxing services Marketplace listings: Create Web Sites Marketplace listings: Mailing services

You're off and running

Staying focused and keeping track of the research you do about colleges is a great start to a successful academic career. Work hard, have fun...and don't forget to write.

"I was thrown out of college for cheating on the metaphysics exam; I looked into the soul of the boy sitting next to me." — Woody Allen

About the author

Annik Stahl, the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.