

EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Netting a more complete college picture

Brochures, campus tours and chats with recruiters have traditionally been the main sources to help high school students sort through their choices for college.

But the Internet enables college-bound students and their parents to dig deeper, says Ken Hartman, a College Board director of admissions and guidance services and author of *Internet Guide for College-Bound Students* (The College Board, \$14.95). He urges consumers to search the World Wide Web for information on topics such as campus safety, financial aid and student evaluations of faculty.

"Heretofore if a student had a question, he'd take a tour with a guide trained to give the official response," Hartman says. Now, "the power is shifting into the students' domain." Here, he explains the basics to USA TODAY's Mary Beth Marklein.



Kenneth Hartman: The Internet is shifting power to students looking at colleges, the author says.

Q: What's the difference between official and unofficial information?

A: Official information is information a school puts out with the intent of promoting the institution. Ninety-nine percent of the time that's all kids will read.

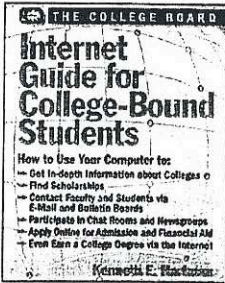
Unofficial Web sites contain information that isn't presented specifically to inform and impress prospective students but that is available to them through other avenues. A lot of colleges won't put that information on their home pages, but you'll find it by going to other places.

Q: Such as?

A: Every college Web site is different. But I steer people toward the student newspaper, class schedules, e-mail addresses, and student and faculty home pages.

For example, an e-mail directory can help you locate and send questions to enrolled students, faculty and alumni. It's amazing how receptive and honest they are. You could also ask students about faculty or search the college Web site for faculty evaluations, which may be posted on line.

You can also read the student newspaper on line and



search back issues using key words you're interested in such as "crime on campus," "Asian-Americans" or "student government."

There are also off-campus sources. A Jewish student could go to <http://www.hillel.org> to learn about Jewish life on every campus around the country. Or, you could check out fraternities and sororities at <http://www.greekpages.com>

Q: How are schools responding?

A: Admission departments will now be under pressure to

Using the summer months to lay groundwork on line

Ken Hartman, author of *Internet Guide for College-Bound Students*, urges families to take advantage of summer to plan for college. Here are some of his suggestions.

Graduating seniors bound for college:

- ▶ Find out if your college provides e-mail accounts during the summer to incoming freshmen.

- ▶ Get the name (and e-mail address if possible) of your new roommate and e-mail him or her.

- ▶ Introduce yourself to your academic adviser via e-mail.

- ▶ Read course syllabuses on line and/or e-mail professors about summer reading assignments to get a jump on the course.

- ▶ Join electronic newsgroups and mailing lists about your career interests.

- ▶ Look for employment opportunities on campus and in the surrounding area.

High school students:

- ▶ Do a search to create a list of 10-20 schools that meet your criteria for selecting a college, such as majors offered, geographic location and costs. Many free search vehicles are available, but you may get unsolicited e-mail if you register with a service that sells names of its clients to companies with interests in higher education, such as test preparation services or lenders.

- ▶ Do a free private scholarship search your junior year. Again, some commercial searchers may sell your name to other companies.

Parents:

- ▶ Fill out a financial aid work sheet on line to get a ballpark figure on your expected contribution. Hartman recommends using an on-line work sheet run by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. The Web page is: <http://finaid.org>

Hartman's top college Web sites

Conducting a college search
<http://www.collegeboard.org/csearch/html/ch00.html>
<http://www.collegenet.com>

Conducting a free scholarship search
<http://www.fastweb.com/>

On-line financial aid calculators (forecasts college costs, how much to save each month, estimates on repayment)
<http://www.salliemae.com:80/calculators/index.html>

General financial aid information
<http://www.finaid.org>

Searching careers or academic majors
<http://www.collegeboard.org/career/bn/career.pl>

Student newspapers on line
<http://www.yahoo.com/news/newspapers/>

Examples of unofficial information
UNC-Chapel Hill crime report:
<http://www.adp.unc.edu/psafety/summaries/>
Penn State alumni: <http://www.alumni.psu.edu/guestbook/guestbook.html>

be more candid about the cons as well as the pros of their institutions. One college Web site provides a classic example. It talked about how wonderful the English department is and said something like, "Imagine being taught by so-and-so." If you clicked on the picture, it listed all the awards the faculty member had received and all the works he has written. But if you went to the English department's home page and looked at the class schedule, he wasn't teaching anything. They've

since revised their Web site.

Q: Could colleges try to control their networks more carefully?

A: There's reluctance to do that because it opens up a whole hornet's nest of problems. Now they're just thankful that not everybody knows how to access the information. But they're also beginning to say, "What are we going to do?"

One option is to put up firewalls so only people with certain passwords get access to

certain information. That would ultimately backfire because people would wonder what they are trying to hide. If the college says students can't have personal home pages, somebody will set up a little business and sell them to college students.

Even when colleges try to put the kibosh on things, there are ways through which smart, Internet-savvy kids can find the information.

Q: How else can the Inter-

net help college-bound students?

A: Newsgroups and mailing lists will be increasingly important. Heretofore, parents weren't able to communicate, but now they can share information. Let's say I find out through a newsgroup that a \$15,000-a-year private college where my son was accepted is underenrolled. Now I know the college is in a very vulnerable position. I can use that to negotiate a lower tuition, because \$10,000 is better than nothing.

