

CHARLOTTE-A roomful of college consultants was asked to list their favorite college search websites during a recent workshop session at the Independent Educational Consultants Association fall conference. Their responses offer insight into what the "pros" use to develop college lists and advise students. Priority was given to accuracy, ease of use, breadth of information, and currency of data sources:

College Navigator: Maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics <<http://nces.ed.gov/>> (NCES), College Navigator is a free consumer tool designed to help students, parents, counselors, and others gather data about nearly 7000 colleges and universities located in every corner of the country. There's no glamour here, but it's hard to beat the quality and depth of data provided by those diligent government statisticians.

U-CAN <<http://www.ucan-network.org/>>: Another free data source, the U-CAN (University and College Accountability Network) search function includes 17 different variables covering student costs, tuition trends, admission and graduation rates, average student aid packages and much more. Developed and maintained by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities <<http://www.naicu.edu/>> (NAICU), U-CAN employs a consumer-friendly format that is colorful, understandable, and easy to use.

U.S. News and World Report College Search <<http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges>> (Common Data Set): A byproduct of the infamous US News and World Report ranking, the website not only provides some of the statistical underpinnings used to rate and rank colleges but also makes available a valuable source of useful information. The basics are free, but for a small additional charge even more detailed data is provided.

Unigo <<http://www.unigo.com/>> : With searchable reviews, videos, and photos from over 15,000 college students, Unigo offers an opportunity to learn about the several hundred colleges and universities covered by the site. Linking up with the Wall Street Journal <<http://www.unigo.com/wsj/>> has added even more depth and richness to the quality of information provided.

YOUiversityTV <<http://www.youniversitytv.com/youlife/index.home.php>>: A relative newcomer, YOUiversityTV is rapidly becoming a favorite among counselors and colleges for the quality of the videos produced. YOUiversityTV not only provides free access to videos and educational resources on over 400 colleges, but has also established an interesting social networking component dedicated to college information-sharing.

College Portrait <<http://www.collegeportraits.org/>>: Billed as a voluntary reporting system, College Portrait is sponsored by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities <<https://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=183>> (APLU) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities <<http://www.aascu.org/>>. The website provides basic, comparable information on undergraduate student experiences at 300 public universities as based on an extremely thorough survey completed as part of the Voluntary System of Accountability Program <<http://www.voluntarysystem.org/index.cfm>>.

Source: Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA), <http://www.educationalconsulting.org>

My Personal Favorites:

<http://www.collegeboard.com>

<http://www.petersons.com/>

Sources of more subjective or anecdotal information (however, care must be taken with these sites as they often contain biased or even "planted" posts):

College Prowler, CollegeProwler.com

College Confidential, <http://www.collegeconfidential.com>

StudentsReview, <http://www.studentsreview.com>

Review.com

<http://www.collegeconfidential.com/>