

Alumni & Parent Panel Discussion

A panel discussion helps seniors and their parents hear about the college experience firsthand from alumni and their parents. College students generally love talking about their lives on campus, and your students will appreciate the opportunity to hear from their near-peers about what it's like to transition from your high school into college. Parents, especially those who have never been to college themselves, will appreciate the chance to hear about the pitfalls and successes of sending kids onto education after high school.

Time

Approximately 60 minutes

Audience

12th grade students and their parents

Scheduling

When college students are home for breaks, often in mid-December

Materials needed

- 3-5 alumni now in college
- 3-5 parents of alumni now in college
- Student & parent questions (p. 2-5)
- Blank paper and pencils for participants to write their own questions
- Computer/projector/speakers to show video (*optional*)
- 2 rooms, 1 for students and 1 for parents

Agenda

Before the event

- Prepare your panelists by providing them with the pre-determined questions.
- Remind them that students and parents may have additional questions.
- Discuss how they might respond to questions about sensitive topics (*i.e.* alcohol on campus or financial questions); generally, panelists should be honest but not feel compelled to share any information that makes them uncomfortable.

5 minutes

- General welcome
- Explain format for the evening
- Show video: I Wish I Knew youtu.be/ZP1ihDKkvF4 (*optional*)

45 minutes

- Break into two groups – one for parents and one for students.
- Encourage each participant to write down at least one question they have.
- Collect the questions.
- Shuffle the handwritten questions with the prepared questions, and distribute equally to participants.
- Introduce the panelists – at minimum, they should share their name, the year they (or their child) graduated from high school, and where they (or their child) attend.
- Encourage participants to read out the questions they've been given and have the panelists respond.

10 minutes

- Bring parents and students back to the same room.
- Ask a few attendees to talk about one thing they learned that surprised them.
- Thank panel members and attendees and share any upcoming deadlines (e.g. financial aid forms, college applications, etc.)



STUDENT QUESTION

How do you manage your time and responsibilities?

STUDENT QUESTION

Have you ever felt like college is too hard? If so, what did you do about it?

STUDENT QUESTION

Do you live in the dorms, at home, or in your own house or apartment off-campus? What are the pros and cons of each option?

STUDENT QUESTION

How are you and your family sharing the financial responsibility for college expenses?

STUDENT QUESTION

What do you wish you had known before college about choosing a major?

STUDENT QUESTION

Are you working while you're in college? Is your job on campus or off? What are the benefits or drawbacks of working while in school?

STUDENT QUESTION

What advice do you have for talking to college administrators, like those in the admissions or financial aid offices?

STUDENT QUESTION

What kinds of student clubs or organizations are you involved in? What kinds of activities do you do with those clubs? Do you have advice about joining them?

STUDENT QUESTION

What do you miss most about home while you're at school?

STUDENT QUESTION

What do you and your friends do for fun on the weekends?

STUDENT QUESTION

What is the best way to meet people or make new friends?

STUDENT QUESTION

What do you wish you had known before college about accessing support services?

STUDENT QUESTION

What do you wish you had known before college about studying?

STUDENT QUESTION

What do you wish you had known before college about setting a class schedule?

STUDENT QUESTION

Have you been homesick during your first year? How did you get over it?

STUDENT QUESTION

Do you have any advice about talking to your parents about finances?

PARENT QUESTION

How do you respond to your student when they say “This is too hard. I don’t like it here. I want to drop out.”?

PARENT QUESTION

Have you talked with your student about financing college expenses? How did you broach the subject?

PARENT QUESTION

How are you and your student sharing the financial responsibility for college?

PARENT QUESTION

We know there are costs associated with tuition, fees, room and board, books, etc.; what were some of the unanticipated costs that we should prepare for?

PARENT QUESTION

What was the transition like for you and your family when your student went to college?

PARENT QUESTION

What rights do parents have to talk with administrators at the college?

PARENT QUESTION

How often (and how) do you communicate with your student? Do you talk on the phone, text, send email?

PARENT QUESTION

If your student is living away from home, what happens when they are sick? How do they get help?

PARENT QUESTION

If your student is living away from home, has your student been homesick during his or her first year? How did you help?

PARENT QUESTION

What do you wish you had known before your child went to college?

PARENT QUESTION

How involved were you in deciding where your child went to school? What were the primary factors in that decision?

PARENT QUESTION

What resources or opportunities does the college have for parents?

PARENT QUESTION

What has your student struggled with at college? How have you helped them?

PARENT QUESTION

What was the most helpful thing that you or your student did in high school to prepare for college?

PARENT QUESTION

How do you feel about your student's college experience?

PARENT QUESTION

What has surprised you about your student's college experience?