

Four Critical Questions for the College Search
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Any parent who has survived the college admissions process with their children knows it is an emotional rollercoaster. Both parents and their children experience the excitement of launching the next chapter of their lives, as well as the stresses of the application and selection process, and separation anxiety. I clearly remember touring campus after campus with my daughter and observing her decision making process about each school, once (to my chagrin) without even getting out of the car. We asked a range of questions, including about class size, curriculum, engagement with professors, and student life. We toured the dorms, classrooms, dining halls, and athletic facilities. But in hindsight, there were some crucial questions that we did not ask about the schools' records on sexual assault, and the policies and procedures they had in place to prevent sexual violence and support survivors.

Thankfully, my daughter graduated from college without ever experiencing the trauma of being sexually assaulted. But the reality is that one in five women are sexually assaulted during their time in college. If I had known that when my daughter was applying, it would have certainly set off alarm bells, and I would have appreciated advice about what questions to ask. So when parents ask me what questions they can ask schools they are checking out, I often recommend these four:

What training or other prevention and education programs does your school provide to help stop sexual assault from happening in the first place?

- **Prevention programs can change attitudes, behavior, and the culture.**
- **The new Clery Act regulations require schools to provide information on culturally relevant, inclusive prevention awareness programs** both to incoming students and on an ongoing basis. Among other things, these programs must include:
 - Definitions of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and consent;
 - A description of safe and positive options for bystander intervention;
 - Information on risk reduction; and
 - Information on the school's policies and procedures after a sex offense occurs.
- Additionally, many schools have awareness and bystander intervention training campaign chapters on their campuses, such as the [It's On Us campaign](#). You can ask if there are those sorts of programs on the campus as well.

Do you have a Title IX coordinator? Who is that person and what responsibilities does he or she hold?

- **Title IX is a federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education programs and activities.** The scope of Title IX is far broader than sexual violence; it also includes, for example, other forms of sexual harassment, equity in athletics or academic programming, and support for pregnant and parenting students.

- **Each institution is required to designate at least one employee as its Title IX coordinator**, to oversee the school’s efforts to comply with and carry out its Title IX responsibilities. Though this requirement is not new – it is contained in the Title IX regulations from 40 years ago - some schools have not designated a Title IX coordinator. And in its enforcement work, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has found that some of the more harmful violations occur when a school either has failed to either designate a Title IX coordinator or hasn’t sufficiently trained or given the appropriate level of authority to its coordinator. By contrast, OCR has found that schools with an effective Title IX coordinator are much more likely to protect students from discrimination or sexual assault. Designating a coordinator ensures that someone is knowledgeable and attentive to the school’s civil rights obligations, which can improve the chances of preventing or quickly resolving any systemic problems.

Does your school have an easy-to-understand process for reporting sexual assault? How do I find it?

- **Each institution must, under the law, publish grievance procedures providing for the prompt and equitable resolution of student and employee sex discrimination complaints.** The published procedures should be easily accessible to students. This transparency is critical so students understand where they can go if something happens, and what procedures the school will follow. The procedures should, at a minimum, address:
 - Where complaints may be filed (and should include reporting policies and protocols with provisions for confidential reporting);
 - What procedures apply to complaints filed by students alleging sexual violence carried out by employees, other students, or third parties; and
 - Provisions for adequate, reliable, and impartial investigations of complaints.

What services do you have to support students?

- Schools should provide training to students to ensure they understand their rights under Title IX as well as due process rights, and should also make sure that all students are aware of any resources available to them, including victim advocacy, housing assistance, academic support, counseling, disability services, health and mental services, and legal assistance. **We know schools are working hard to eradicate sexual assault from their campuses, and part of that effort is ensuring students have support systems throughout the campus and know how to access them.**

College students should be free to explore their intellectual curiosities in an environment where they are safe and enabled to learn and grow into responsible, well-educated adults. Asking these important questions will help make that possible.