Since its introduction a year ago, The EDUCAUSE Guide to Evaluating Information Technology on Campus has helped thousands of prospective college and university students and their parents evaluate the information technology resources provided by schools across the country. The Guide has been featured in stories in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Business Week, and other national media and is being increasingly referred to in a wide range of news reports. Now, to build context and further assist in this decision-making process, EDUCAUSE has expanded the Guide in an online version with more complete interpretive information (http://www.educause.edu/consumerguide/).1 Filled with practical explanations and easy-to-understand charts and graphs, the online Guide provides comparative data that illustrate the level of IT use and innovation among six institutional classifications: private and public two-year colleges; private and public four-year colleges; and private and public universities.

The Guide does not rank schools. Instead, it identifies a set of critical questions that parents and students should ask in order to match a student’s specific academic needs with the offerings of prospective colleges and universities. A key assumption is that in evaluating technology, students should not use the “more is better” criterion. Depending on students’ academic interests, more technology or the extent of advanced technology may or may not be pertinent.

Brian L. Hawkins, EDUCAUSE president, says the online Guide provides a comprehensive method to help potential consumers better understand how colleges and universities are using IT and networks to enhance classroom education, provide improved administrative services, expand library access, and create more integrated societies of student learners. “Even more important, the expanded Guide will help students and parents develop a context for thinking about these innovations, what they cost, and why they are important. This should provide an important service to families trying to find just the right fit as they enter the higher education market,” Hawkins said.

The Guide offers information and suggests critical questions regarding four areas:

1. Academic Experience. How many campus courses use IT to enhance learning? What library resources are available online? How does the campus help students develop computer skills? Does the campus have a specific computer/IT competency requirement for all undergraduates? How many faculty have access to a networked computer?
2. Administrative Experience. Are student records and data available online? Is registration—including dropping and adding classes—processed electronically? Can students obtain their grades online or by phone? Can students pay bills, receive loans, and make bookstore purchases online?
3. Social Experience. Does the campus allow personal Web pages? Is contact information for students, faculty, and staff readily available? Is there a campus code of conduct for use of computing and information resources?
4. Requirements, Services, and Cost. What, if any, technology fee is charged, and what does it cover? Are students required to purchase their own computer? What kinds of services—help desk, training, troubleshooting—are provided by the campus, and during what hours of operation? Does the campus assess extra fees for connections to the dorms or for off-campus connections?

The enhanced Guide provides a detailed explanatory note for every question, explaining the context for the question and the reason the question might be relevant. Charts or graphs illustrating national norms also accompany most questions. Information on national norms is provided by The Campus Computing Project and its director, Kenneth C. Green.

Since the Guide was introduced, hundreds of campuses have ordered copies of the print brochure to pass out to prospective students, and a number have developed their own Web sites answering the questions raised in the Guide. EDUCAUSE is now providing links to these campus-specific sites from the online Guide. We encourage members to develop such sites and to send the URLs to <consumerguide@educause.edu>.

Note
1. The Guide was developed by EDUCAUSE in cooperation with the National Association for College Admission Counseling and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. Hard copies of the Guide, without the charts and explanatory notes, can be ordered from the EDUCAUSE Web site for a nominal fee.

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