

"How I Got Here: Joseph—Educator-focused Video"

Lucy: Hi, I'm Lucy. If you're in need of a big smile, then you'll really dig this video about our friend, Joseph. They guy is amazingly talented and his story about finding the right college for him reads like a fairy tale.

Joseph has it all. He's a musical genius. He's a real-life big man on campus and his enthusiasm is off the charts. Just like me but the complete opposite. With so much going for Joseph, finding a college should be no big deal. Right? No so much. He had to wrestle with some pretty significant questions. Luckily, he's naturally inquisitive and dealing with these questions was a challenge he embraced and didn't shy away from in the least. That's why it's super important to note that things didn't magically fall into place for him.

Finding the right college took real work. Joseph had some expectations of his own initially. He knew that music was what he wanted to focus on, so with that in mind, he considered Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston State right off the bat. His mom is an alum of Texas A & M, so that school certainly came into play.

Joseph also deals with some personal tragedy along the way. Instead of throwing in the towel, he uses it as extra motivation to find the right college fit and make a major impact when he gets there.

Spoiler, Houston Tillotson ultimately felt just right to him and Houston Tillotson became an even better place the moment Joseph stepped on campus. That's just the Joseph effect. I mean the dude is Mr. Houston Tillotson, literally. The guy could make you excited about paint drying. He does a fantastic job of really articulating what he's looking for in a college experience and this is huge to impart to kids.

Yes, getting into a college is fabulous, but you're in a position to shop around so take advantage of that. No shopping excursion is complete without a list. Joseph had a list for sure. He knew exactly what kind of environment he thrives in. He wanted smaller classes and a community vibe on campus. These are really specific ones and the only way to definitely check these boxes is to put in the work. Let's watch Joseph do his thing.

Joseph: Hello everyone, my name is Joseph. I am a junior Music Education major at Houston Tillotson University. I am Mr. Houston Tillotson University, an ambassador of the university. I play piano. I sing and I play trombone in the jazz band. Music, for me, is exploring what's possible. It is an adventure if you think about it.

Growing up, I always considered going to college. My father was a train engineer. My mother, she's been teaching for 36 years. My father passed when I was a senior in high school. Of course, I was feeling down when everything happened but I turned what most people would take as an excuse into motivation to continue and to do better.

Lucy: So, what's the best way to find the right college? Where to even start? Coming up, Joseph explains what felt right for him. This was more than just a gut instinct. For him, going to college was never really a question, but in order for his choice to feel right, some criteria needed to be met. It was very important for him to be in a smaller community. He loves being a big fish in a little pond. Houston Tillotson and Joseph are a perfect match, since the University has obviously embraced him and celebrates his unique personality but hey, that's just his story. Joseph could have very well been the type of person who was looking for a larger pond with a bunch of smaller fish, or maybe he could have been hunting for a mid-size pond with mid-size fish. Whatever the setting, he wouldn't have known without some kind of self examination and defined expectations.

Next is a great section for your students to see. Joseph's classmates will share the reasons they each picked Houston Tillotson and you'll notice that not one of them says "It's the only place I got accepted to" or "It was the only school I applied to". Their reasons run deep.

Joseph: When it came time to consider college, I knew that I wanted to go but I didn't know what college would be the perfect fit. I looked at Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston State. I thought I would go to Texas A & M because my mother was an alumni, but I decided to come to HT because it felt right for me.

Our student body is less than 1,000. Classes are small. I really thrive in this atmosphere because there is this sense of community.

Lucy: Let's talk about developing a solid research strategy. The internet is a totally logical place to start but clicking on pretty campus pictures isn't enough. You should encourage kids to reach out and connect with current and past students. There are alumni associations that would be more than happy to talk to a prospective student about how great their alma mater is. Their goal should be to find out what is the one thing that this school offer that no other school can.

Taking a campus tour is an excellent idea. Remember that the college visit is also a chance for the university to sell you on their school, so your students need to be prepared to ask lots of questions. Leave no stone unturned. Ask about facilities. Is the library any good? Can anybody use the gym? What kind of campus events are there for students? Is the food in the cafeteria decent? What kind of common areas are there to hang out or study in? Is this campus pretty active or mainly a commuter campus? Get seriously inquisitive.

Advise your students to start with the internet and all the connectivity available there. Once they've narrowed down their list, it's time to visit some campuses, if possible, for a first-hand look at where they'd be going. Remind them that their decision is all about their own wants and needs, not anybody else's. Not their parents, not their best friends, not their over-involved neighbor, they should really ask themselves, "Can I see myself here?"

Another way to zero in on a school is to sit in on some classes in your major to see what it would actually feel like to be a student there. Your students hold all the cards and should be encouraged to approach their search with a "What's in it for me?" Frame of mind.

Okay, let's get back to Joseph's epic tale.

Joseph: How you doing sir?

Speaker 3: Hey there. How are you doing?

Joseph: Would you walk over here with me? I have a question for you. I have some questions for you. What would you say drew you to HT?

Speaker 3: It's right here in Austin in the middle of downtown.

Speaker 4: Great living quarters.

Speaker 5: The scholarship opportunities.

Speaker 3: Just the support system.

Speaker 4: Family feel.

Speaker 3: Family atmosphere.

Speaker 6: I like the small campus and how beautiful it was. That's really how I came about HT.

Joseph: We have a lot in common, sir.

For those of you who are worried about finding the right college, some things that I would say would be go out there and look. Don't be afraid to view college campuses. Have an open mind and make sure that you're visiting for yourself. You need to take in the atmosphere. Make sure that this is somewhere that you can see yourself spending four plus years at.

I suggest that you visit a class in a subject that you may be majoring in. Get a feel for how the teacher teaches. It's important to find the right place where you can discover what you want to be, discover what you want to do and, most importantly, discover who you are.

If your personality is like this, you wouldn't be happy in some place like this.

I have the privilege of being a big fish in a small pond. Here I am, getting ready to graduate. The right college is out there for you. Don't be afraid to get out there and look for it. It's out there.

Lucy: As Joseph explains, it's all about finding that happy place where you can discover yourself and truly develop your future. The only way to get to that happy place is to get out there and seek it out for yourself.

These days, there are a lot of high schools and programs in the state that coordinate campus visits. It's important to let your students know that this is something they should be taking advantage of if it's offered at their school. It's usually not enough to go off of secondary research. It's always best if you can see it for yourself. Colleges are more than willing to roll out the red carpet for the chance to show off their school. Some will allow you to sit in on a class or two and even spend the night in the dorm for a real life experience.

As your students continue their search for just the right college, remind them of the types of resources they need to be engaging with. Admissions counselors at prospective universities are wonderful resources. They are there to answer questions and can also point out funding options that may not have been readily apparent. Reaching out to friends and family about their college experiences is also a place to get some scoop. College brochures only tell half the story. To get the nitty gritty, it takes some investigative work and an open mind.

The bottom line is that finding the right college should be fun. It's a big decision, and with the right approach, it can be thorough, enlightening and a complete blast. Kids just need to decide what kind of fish they want to be and what kind of pond they want to swim in. Oh, and always beware, the worm.