

THE CAMPUS VISIT

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME ON CAMPUS

Campus visits are an essential part of your college search process. The purpose of these visits is for you to gain information about whether you and a particular college are a **good match**. A campus visit makes a college come alive. The visiting process allows you to find out more than just facts and figures about a college. Being on campus allows you to **get a feel** for the students and the campus and to find out if you will fit in.

Choosing a college is like a buyer-seller relationship. Both you and the college need to exchange information about each other so that you can make a good choice about the purchase of an education that will prepare you for your future. You should always plan to visit a college before you make your final decision on where to attend.

WHEN TO VISIT

Campus visits can take place at any time beginning with the freshman year, however most visits occur in the spring of the junior year, the summer following the junior year, and the fall of the senior year.

Many students visit campuses during the summer between their junior and senior years. While this is not the best time to see a campus "in action," it's a relaxed time for admissions staffs and usually the easiest time for families to get away. The fall of the senior year is a good time to see a campus, and at some schools that best time to schedule an interview.

Sometimes students schedule visits in the spring of the senior year right before they make their final decision. While this is certainly helpful in making that final decision, you should not wait until this late to make your first visit to a college.

HOW TO SCHEDULE AND PREPARE FOR A VISIT

Contact the admissions office of the colleges you wish to visit by telephone. You should always do this well in advance of the date that you would like to visit. When you call, ask if you can sign up for a **guided tour**. If you are required to have an **interview** or a **group information session** as part of the application process, see if you can schedule it for the same time as your visit. Also arrange to be able to **talk with a professor** (in your area of interest) and **sit in on a class** so that you can investigate the academic side of college life. On the social side, find out if there are any **campus events** that you can attend. If all possible, **stay overnight in a dorm** to discover what this experience is like and to have the opportunity to talk with other students on an informal basis.

Colleges will generally send a packet of information to students requesting a visit, but make sure you request a **campus map, a catalog (if they are still produced)**, a copy of the **campus newspaper**, and **information about special programs** or areas of interest. Make sure you inquire about campus driving and parking regulations.

Get prepared for the visit by **reading the information** you receive. This allows you to ask intelligent questions once you are on campus that were not covered in the materials you received. Make sure you also make a **list of places on campus** you would like to see like the library, computer labs, a typical dorm room, a campus cafeteria, and the bookstore.

ABOUT THE CAMPUS TOUR

Guided tours are an excellent way to get acquainted with a campus. Tour guides are usually students, and they can be great sources of informal information. Ask questions that are geared to both your academic and social interests. Ask about extracurricular activities and typical gathering places for students. Be sure to take notes to help

you keep the facts straight later on when it is time to make a decision.

WHAT ROLE WILL YOUR PARENTS PLAY?

Although your parents will play a part in the visit and will certainly want to visit the Financial Aid Office, among other places, you are the main participant. You will need to take the initiative and ask about the things that are of importance to you. You and your parents should make plans that allow you to go off on your own to do some investigation, especially when you talk to students. Your parents can be very helpful, however, when it comes to asking about practical matters such as how many electrical outlets a dorm room has, or if there is enough closet and drawer space . . . so listen to their questions and suggestions.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

In addition to questions that you might think of, be sure to ask some of the following:

- * Why do students select this college?
- * What is the attitude of students about college/
- * What are the class sizes for different types of freshman classes?
- * Who teaches most of the freshman classes? Is it common to have a graduate student or teaching assistant rather than a full professor?
- * What kind of academic advising is available and how easy is it to see an adviser?
- * How easy is it to get the classes you need the first two years?
- * What are the most popular majors?
- * Is the student population diverse?
- * How easy is it to become involved in campus life?
- * What social activities are available to students?
- * What happens on weekends? Do students stay on campus?
- * What are the traditions of this school?
- * What kinds of dorms are available? Are there controlled study times?
- * What kinds of computer facilities are available in the dorms and on the rest of the campus?
- * How up to date are the facilities? (Computer labs, lab equipment, video technology)
- * What kinds of security precautions are in place for students?
- * What kinds of transportation are available for on- and off-campus travel?

- * Are relations good between the town/community and the college students?
- * What are the campus publications and how can you get a copy?
- * What meal plans and eating facilities are available?
- * Where can a student go with an academic problem? A personal problem?
- * What are the best departments with the best teachers?
- * What opportunities exist for independent study and study abroad?
- * What if I am unsure about a major? Is this a good place to explore options? Is career counseling available?

PEOPLE AND PLACES TO BE SURE TO VISIT

The following are important places to visit or people to talk to as part of your guided tour or on your own:

Financial Aid Office: If you know that you will have to rely on some financial aid to attend college, make it a point to stop by this office. You might want to ask how the school determines financial need, what proportion of need is likely to be met, and what percentage of students who have need are helped. Find out which aid forms the college requires.

Housing Office: If the campus has dormitories, you will most probably spend at least one year living in one. Arrange to see a **typical** dorm room . . . not the fanciest one available but one that you might likely be assigned to. Speak to students in the dorm to find out what the living arrangements and the quality of life is like. You should also ask about off-campus living arrangements as well. You might ask about living arrangements and costs in a sorority or fraternity house also.

Library: Check out the facilities of this important building since you will most probably be spending a considerable amount of time there over the next four years. What are the resources available? How easy is to access information? Can you enter the stacks yourself or must someone else get the books for you? Are plenty of copiers available on each floor for student use and how expensive are the copies? Are computers available? Does the staff seem friendly and helpful to students? What is the library setup and is it well-organized and easy to understand? Ask students how they feel about the library and its staff. Is it a good, quiet place to study?

Student Dining Halls: This is another place where you may spend a considerable amount of your time, so check out the facilities. Ask other students about the quality of the food. Eat a meal there if at all possible. What are the serving hours? Is there a variety of options available? Flexibility is important if you have classes at odd hours of the day. Are there plenty of places on campus and nearby campus to eat if you cannot make it to the regular dining halls? Is there a convenience store nearby where you can buy emergency items for your room?

Fraternity and Sorority Houses: If you think you wish to join a fraternity or sorority, be sure to have the tour guide point out the houses, or find them for yourself. Ask students about how important belonging to one is to the social life on campus.

Bookstore and Student Center: Check out the facilities and the variety of things available in the bookstore. Is the student center a friendly, student-oriented type of place?

Students: Talk to as many students as you can find and ask them all kinds of questions about campus life, educational facilities, social activities, etc. Most students other than your tour guide who tries to give an overall good impression, will be very honest in their opinions. The more students you talk to, the more you can tell whether there's a pattern about what students say they like and don't like about college. Listen to all positive and negative

comments with caution because your perceptions and needs are different than the person making the comment.

Faculty: Try to make arrangements to talk with a faculty member in the area of study that you are considering. Most faculty members are willing to speak with students visiting the campus and answer any questions. You might try visiting faculty offices and spontaneously asking a few people some questions about the academic offerings at the college. You might also ask about the advising process.

Special Areas of Interest: If you are interested in a special area such as drama, dance, vocal or instrumental music, fine arts, or athletics, make sure you check out the facilities and programs available for this area. You can get the telephone number of these departments/areas ahead of time and try to schedule an appointment to meet with someone to tour the facilities.

Religious Organizations: If religious activities are important to you, be sure to ask what is available on campus and in the surrounding community. Most colleges have regularly scheduled activities for a variety of religious affiliations.

Extracurricular Activities: It is important to know what kinds of recreational, cultural, club and organizational activities are available because you won't be studying all the time. Ask about the number and kind of recreational facilities. Find out if intramural sports are available. How do students become involved in clubs and organizations? Where are the nearest movie theaters, stores, and restaurants? Does the campus newspaper list all these events for the benefit of students?

MAKING THE EVALUATION

Take a few moments before you leave the campus to make final notes about your experience. Don't trust that you will remember everything you learned from your visit. Make a list of pros and cons and try to write down as many as you can generate. Based on all the information you have learned from a variety of sources, try to write a summary of your feelings about the school. Have your parents do the same thing from their point of view.

Keep this summary in a file you have established for your college visits. If other thoughts occur to you later, simply add them to the list or summary.

FINAL THOUGHTS

By taking the time to make a thorough campus visit to a number of places, you are taking the correct steps to finding the college that is the **right fit** for you. You are searching for the college with the resources and the qualities that would make it a good place for you to spend your time (and your money). You are looking for that certain feeling about an educational environment that is a combination of people, physical setting, location, tradition, and attitude. Only you make this kind of decision!

SOME IMPORTANT THINGS "TO DO"

DO schedule your visit at a time that will allow you to see what is really going on. Try to avoid times where you will not be able to see the campus as it is on a day-to-day basis, i.e. exam week, interim times between terms, vacation breaks. If you have to schedule your visit during the summer, do it when a summer session is going on. .and just be aware that there will be fewer students on campus and fewer activities going on.

DO realize that there is no one **ideal** college. Each one will have good points and bad points. You are looking for the one where **you** can fit in and feel happy.

DO look at a variety of schools and explore their possibilities and don't make snap judgments. Just because a school is big does not mean it is automatically impersonal; just because a school is small does not make it automatically

more student-oriented; just because a school has great athletic teams does not mean it is weak in academics.

DO take the time to meet as many people on campus as possible and keep track of their names. Take the time to write a thank you to the admissions staff who arranged your visit and to the people who took the time to visit with you. This is a simple courtesy and a good way to be remembered favorably.

DO be yourself as you meet people on your visit. You're looking for the right fit for you . . . the way you are in your everyday life . . . so be yourself as you talk to and interact with others.