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**COLLEGE VISIT GUIDE**

# THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLEGE VISITS

College visits are a critical component of the college search process for every prospective student. The visit provides valuable insight into the student life and academic experience at an institution. Among other things, visiting campus gives you the opportunity to:

- See the people, opportunities, facilities, and resources at each school, and picture yourself as a student there.
- Make connections - particularly with the admissions office and any departments that interest you.
- Decide if you should apply.
- Show your interest in a school - some colleges and universities consider “demonstrated interest” when evaluating a student’s application.

## WHEN TO VISIT

### ADVANTAGES OF VISITING DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR:

- Gives you a clearer picture of what life is like on a day-to-day basis
- Many events occurring on campus
- May be able to sit in on a class or two

### ADVANTAGES OF VISITING DURING THE SUMMER:

- Easier to travel, can visit several universities at the same time
- Can see the campus at your own pace
- You might also consider visiting a school more than once; if possible, it is important to visit before you apply, and you should plan to revisit after you have been admitted

## VISIT TYPES AND HOW TO SCHEDULE

### THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO VISIT A CAMPUS, BOTH OFFICIALLY AND UNOFFICIALLY.

- **Unofficial visits.** If you are traveling near a college and are not able to go on an official visit, take a few hours to see the campus on your own. Walk around, see how it feels and if you can imagine yourself as a student there. Talk to students and people in the area to see what the atmosphere is like. Go to a local restaurant or coffee shop, or even the dining hall (although during the summer, it might not be open!).
- **Information sessions and tours.** Most regular official college visits include an information session, usually delivered by an admissions officer, as well as a campus tour, typically led by a current student.
- **Open houses** are larger events that invite hundreds or even thousands of students to visit campus at one time.
- **Special programs.** Many colleges and universities offer special visit options for some prospective students, including lunch with a current student, day visits for seniors, overnight visits, and athletics visits.
- **Interviews.** Some schools offer informational or evaluative interviews with admissions officers or senior admissions fellows (senior students who work in the admissions office).

If you are planning an official visit to a college campus, it is best to schedule in advance if possible. Almost all schools allow you to schedule your visit online, however, if you happen to be passing through, the admissions office might be able to accommodate you on a campus tour and/or information session.



# WHAT TO DO DURING YOUR VISIT

- **Take notes, photos, and videos.** At the end of a long college trip, things can feel like a blur – even the colleges you loved. Writing down highlights can help you reflect on the school visits – and might serve as inspiration for a great college essay in the future. Many colleges have supplemental essays that ask why you want to attend their institution and notes from past college visits can provide great detail to include in one of these essays.
- **Talk to current students.** Ask them questions about their experience as a student – their likes, dislikes, favorite activities and campus spots. Feel free to talk to students hosting the campus tour and other students hanging out on campus. Ask the same questions to different people - you may get different answers.
- **Visit a class.** Most colleges will offer a class visit or can arrange one for you if it is not advertised. If you have an academic area in which you are interested in majoring, then you should do your best to sit in on a class in that department. However, if it is not possible to visit a class related to your academic interest, do not underestimate the value of exploring a completely new subject. You might like the class so much that you decide to take it as an undergraduate!
- **Eat in a dining hall and people-watch.** You will not only get a taste for the campus food, but you can also observe student life and culture during a short lunch. Perhaps a current student will offer to sit with you – use this opportunity to learn even more about campus life.
- **Talk with faculty members.** Ask the admissions office to arrange a meeting for you, or feel free to drop by the department in which you are interested in studying. If there is a faculty member available to speak with you, it can be a great way to learn more about the academic opportunities available to students. If there is one professor in particular you want to meet, reach out via email before your visit to see if he or she has time for a more formal appointment. Remember to come prepared with a list of questions about the subject s/he teaches, and be ready to share your own experiences and future goals.
- **Leave time to walk around on your own and explore the surrounding community.** This could be your home for the next four years (or longer), so it is important that you get to know the environment. You will also get a sense for how current students interact with the surrounding area.
- **Check out local resources and attractions,** like the college bookstore, transportation options, grocery stores, restaurants, and anything else you think you may need (or want) to have nearby during your four years in college.



# THE INFORMATION SESSION & CAMPUS TOUR

Almost every official college visit will include an information session, usually delivered by an admissions officer, as well as a campus tour, almost always led by a current student. Before your visit, research the school and discuss what is most important to your college experience. During the info session and tour, try to get a full picture of various aspects of the college, including academics, financial aid, the social scene and student life.

## HERE ARE TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK THE ADMISSIONS OFFICER DURING YOUR INFORMATION SESSION:

1. What is the average class size for an introductory class and upper level class?
2. How common is the use of teaching assistants?
3. What types of careers do graduates tend to go into?
4. Are there academic support systems in place, such as tutoring, writing and math centers?
5. What is the prevalence of research on campus? Is it difficult to get a research position with a faculty member as an undergraduate?
6. What percentage of students live on campus in freshman year? What about all four years?
7. Could you describe some of the campus safety measures?
8. Do many students take advantage of the study abroad opportunities?
9. How strong is the alumni network and how can students get involved with it?
10. What is the average amount of debt students graduate with?







## AND HERE ARE TEN GOOD QUESTIONS TO POSE TO YOUR TOUR GUIDE:

1. Are professors readily available to students?
2. Where is your favorite place on campus to study?
3. What housing options are available? Do students get a significant say in where they live and how does the housing lottery work?
4. Are students allowed to have a car on campus?
5. What are some of the most popular events held for students?
6. What do students do for fun? What are the popular hangout spots in the surrounding community?
7. How strong is the presence of Greek life on campus?
8. What are the college's most popular sports?
9. How would you describe a typical student?
10. What was the biggest surprise your first year on campus?

Tours are a great opportunity to see campus for the first time; however, it is important to have an understanding of what college tours do and do not tell you.

## WHAT THEY DO TELL YOU:

- Remember that college tours are largely scripted. Each anecdote and stop along the way has been carefully decided on by the admissions office. From an admissions perspective, the goal of a campus tour is first and foremost to portray the college or university in a positive light.
- Tour guides will typically begin by describing the tradition, values and history of the school with a brief description of the surrounding community. From there, the tour guide will elaborate on academic, extracurricular and social life on campus – taking questions from the crowd along the way. Many schools will also include a visit inside an on-campus dorm room and a stop by a library, dining hall and student center.

## WHAT THEY MAY NOT TELL YOU:

If a college tour guide does his or her job, you and your child will leave campus feeling like you got a candid and honest reflection of the school. With that said, tour guides are ultimately ambassadors of the university and trained on how to navigate and answer questions pertaining to delicate and touchy subjects. Here are some examples of topics tour guides are careful to discuss:

- **Community relations.** Some of the best schools in the country are located in areas where community-campus relations are less than ideal. While tour guides will portray a sense of camaraderie, this is not always the case.
- **Social life.** This is perhaps the most delicate topic for an admissions office. Tour guides are advised carefully on how to describe the social scene on- and off-campus as well as the policies and procedures in place from the perspective of campus safety.
- **Administration.** Whenever new policies and/or school administrators are put in the spotlight, questions are bound to follow. Tour guides are careful to stick to the script rather than voice an opinion when it comes to any conflict between the student body and administration.
- **Admissions strategy and procedures.** While tour guides are quite knowledgeable when it comes to discussing admit rates, early decision numbers, diversity statistics and broad categories of evaluation, they will steer clear of discussing (or making an educated guess of) specific information regarding how application decisions are reached.

Getting a completely accurate depiction of a school is not easy; however, tours and information sessions are a good start. If possible, meet up with an alumnus from your high school and ask if he or she will show you around. Or, make your own tour and ask questions of students you meet – most will be more than happy to talk about their experience.

## WHAT NOT TO DO ON A COLLEGE VISIT

As you are planning your trips, consider these five tips on what not to do while on a college visit:

- **Do not let your parent ask all the questions.** While your parents may be paying for some or all of your education, you are the one attending. Take an active role in asking questions – and be sure to ask the same question at each college so that you can compare them. Even if you are shy, now is the time to speak up.
- **Do not wait until the end of your full tour to take notes.** We suggest taking notes in a small notebook or on a smart phone so that you can remember each college visit. If you can, take notes while sitting in on an information session, or during lunch after your tour. Waiting until after you have seen four colleges in four days will make it difficult to differentiate one from the next.
- **Do not make an unofficial visit.** It is okay to visit a college without signing in for an information session and tour if you are a sophomore, but if you are a junior or rising senior, it is very important to let the college know you have visited. The smaller the college, the more admissions officers will want to see that you have demonstrated interest, but even some large universities track this information.
- **Do not just hang out in the admissions office.** It is a good idea to get out there and see the campus, not just on the tour, but on your own, too. Sit in on a few classes for about 20 - 30 minutes each, eat in a dining hall, stop random students on campus and ask them questions – campuses are open to visitors, so take advantage of it!
- **Do not pass up the opportunity to interview if you feel you will interview well.** Many colleges offer optional interviews to prospective students. Call ahead to learn the specific details at each. Interviewing is the best way to connect directly with the admissions office and talk about your interests in the college. If interviews are evaluative, colleges will take them into consideration when making admissions decisions.

Enjoy your visits – take pictures, take notes, ask questions. Though college admissions can be a stressful process, get the most out of your visits. You will end up at one of these colleges and spend the next four years there!