



Making the Most of Your College Visits

By Allison Bly, Independent College Counselor, allison@blycollegecounseling.com

Visiting a college is a very important part of the college planning process. While reading and conducting research online is a great start, it's difficult to really get a feel for a school until you spend time on the actual campus.

If possible, try to visit colleges before applications are due. This way, you will avoid wasting time applying to schools that aren't a good fit. Also, make sure that you avoid going during a college's breaks as you want to visit schools when students are actually on campus. Usually visiting on a Monday-Thursday will give you the best idea of what a typical day is like on campus.

Taking a campus tour is a great way to start your visit, but make sure to leave time to explore the campus on your own. Below are questions to ask people that you meet on campus:

Questions to Ask Current Students:

- ✓ What is the transition like from high school to college?
- ✓ Why did you select this school?
- ✓ What has your personal experience been like at this school?
- ✓ What do students complain most about?
- ✓ What is it like to live in this town/city? Is there a lot to do?
- ✓ What types of academic and career services are offered to students?
- ✓ What is the campus like on the weekends?
- ✓ What types of activities are popular on campus?
- ✓ Do you find the coursework to be difficult/boring/stimulating?
- ✓ Are students encouraged to work together to solve problems or complete assignments?
- ✓ Are the professors approachable?
- ✓ Do many students study abroad?
- ✓ Is there a variety of food available and is it good?
- ✓ Are students guaranteed on campus housing? What are the residence halls like?
- ✓ Does the campus have wireless Internet access?

Questions to Ask Admissions Officers:

- ✓ How safe is the campus?
- ✓ What programs of study are the strongest/most popular at this school?
- ✓ What is the make-up of the current freshman class? Is it diverse?
- ✓ What types of financial aid options are available to students?
- ✓ What percentage of students return sophomore year?
- ✓ Are accepted students invited on campus for a preview day?
- ✓ Are interviews required?
- ✓ Will you be the person reading my application?
- ✓ How do you evaluate applications? Do certain pieces weigh more in the admissions decision than others?

Questions to Ask Faculty:

- ✓ What is your teaching style like? Is there a lot of collaborative learning in class?
- ✓ Have you experienced many students cheating on assignments or exams?
- ✓ Is there a lot of interaction and discussion in class?
- ✓ What types of assignments do you give? (Ask for a copy of a recent syllabus.)
- ✓ What do you like most about teaching at this school?
- ✓ Is there anything you would change about the students/school?

Making the Most of Your Visit:

Besides taking a tour, there are many other ways to learn about a campus while you are visiting.

- ✓ Sit in on a class.
- ✓ Set up a meeting with a professor in your chosen major.
- ✓ Plan an overnight stay with a student.
- ✓ Look at bulletin boards to see what activities are happening on campus.
- ✓ Read the college's newspaper.
- ✓ Walk through some of the residence halls.
- ✓ Listen to the campus radio station.
- ✓ Pick up financial aid forms.
- ✓ Visit the cafeteria and actually eat a meal.
- ✓ Drive around the surrounding area.

Remember to get the contact information of anyone that you talk to and take plenty of pictures and notes!

Virtual College Visits:

Because it might not be feasible to visit all of the colleges you plan to apply to, there are a variety of online sources for getting a good feel for particular colleges and universities:

<http://www.campustours.com/>

<http://www.theu.com/>

<http://www.youniversitytv.com/colleges>

<http://www.collegeweeklive.com/>

Sources:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/csearch/college-visits/index.html>

<http://collegeapps.about.com/od/choosingacollege/tp/8-Tips-for-a-Campus-Visit.htm>