



How to make the most of your college visit

Tips for Involved Parents and Students

Can you imagine buying a home or a used car after just seeing a photo in a newspaper ad or on the Internet? No? Then, be sure to make the most of your college visits!

Call ahead. Most colleges and universities prefer advanced notice to set up a tour. Some schools allow you to book a tour online. Colleges you visit may have special information sessions as well. Set up a meeting with an admissions counselor, a financial aid advisor, a professor or advisor in the major of interest to you, and, if possible, a student from your hometown or with your planned major. When you've narrowed down your search, you may want to check into an overnight visit at your top pick(s) during which you can stay in a dorm, attend a class, and tour the campus with a student guide. If an interview is required, make arrangements. (Remember to write a thank-you note to anyone with whom you formally meet— interviewer, admissions officer, professor, or coach.)

Visit while classes are in session. Although summer might be the most convenient time, it is not the best time to experience a college. Try and visit while school is in full swing. Visit campuses in a range of sizes and different locales (city, town, suburbs). Applicants frequently alter their preferences after visiting a variety of schools. Observe how the faculty and students interact. Are the teachers interested in the students? Are students engaged in their classes? Do they ask questions (and get answers)?

Give yourself enough time, ask questions, and take notes. One or two campuses a day is enough. Carry a notepad to write down comments, observations, and questions. Ask about the typical class size for freshmen and then for upperclassmen. Will you attend mainly lecture classes (50+ students) or smaller classes (fewer than 20)? If the college

uses graduate students as teaching assistants, find out in what capacity and how often they serve. Is there an honors program? How do you qualify? What is the college's graduation rate? What percentage of students graduate "on time" in four years? What percentage of freshmen return for a second year? What percentage of graduates have a job or acceptance to graduate school within six months? Does the college have majors and minors in which you are interested? What reputation does your major have at the school? How easy is it to change majors if you change your mind? What's the college's policy for accepting AP/IB credits? What opportunities does the school have for special programs, internships, or study abroad? What about technology requirements?

Find out what academic support services are offered to students. What kind of advising, career counseling, and placement services does the college offer? What about tutoring or courses to improve study skills? Is there a writing center where a student can have a paper reviewed before it is submitted? Are there additional charges for these services? What about mentoring programs for incoming first-year students to help them acclimate to college and college-level academics?

Read the student newspaper. The school paper— in print or online— can give you a feel for the school community, issues that concern the students, and available activities and upcoming events.

Visit important places on campus. Tour a couple of dorms. What are the housing options? Is housing guaranteed? Eat lunch in a dining hall. How's the food? What are your options for a meal plan? Visit the library. Attend a sporting or cultural event. Hang out in the student center. Get a true feeling of how students live.

Continued

Talk to students you meet on campus.

Most college students will be more than willing to tell a prospective student what they like or dislike about their school. How does he or she feel walking around the campus at night? Is the student body diverse? What happens on the campus on the weekends? Does it empty out or is there plenty to do? Can freshmen have cars and are cars really necessary? What outstanding professors or courses might they recommend regardless of a student's major? How is computer access on campus? How easy is it to find a job on campus or in town?

E-mail a student or faculty member. Most admissions counselors are happy to put prospective students in touch with a faculty member or student in their planned major. Ask a professor about special opportunities for study and scholarships for your major. Ask a student about best courses and professors and why he or she selected the major. How easy is it to get courses you need at convenient times?

Tour the areas surrounding the campus.

Some colleges require students to live in dorms for all or at least the first year of their college career, but you may live off campus at some point. Check out what the area has to offer. If you won't have a car, does college or community transportation run between student apartments and neighborhoods and the area of campus where you'll have classes? Are groceries stores, book stores, and other retail and entertainment businesses nearby? Do streets bordering campus appear safe and well-lit? Does the community have parks and other recreational facilities that fit your interests? If you're a suburban or rural kid visiting an urban-based college, how comfortable are you with the downtown setting? If you like the city life, look around and make sure you'll be happy at the small-town college.



Sources: *College and Career Specialist JoAn Adams of Dacula High, Counselor Steve Boling of Archer High, SallieMae.com College Fair Checklist, Making It Count, FastWeb, GCPS' Choice Book*

Questions for a financial aid advisor:

- What is the total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, room and board)?
- Does financial need have an impact on admissions?
- What percentage of freshmen receive financial aid?
- What percentage of a student's financial need is met by your institution?
- What is the average financial aid package?
- What percentage of the financial aid package is work study, loans, grants, and scholarships?
- Does the school participate in the federal student aid program?
- What's the average student debt load at graduation?
- What financial aid applications are required?
- What are the deadlines for financial aid?

Questions for an admissions advisor:

- What academic elements are considered in the admissions process? How important are each of the factors?
- For successful applicants, what's the average GPA? Average SAT/ACT score? Average class rank? (top 10%, top 25%, etc.)
- What are entrance requirements? (Number of credits by subject, foreign language, etc)
- What's required for application? (transcript, essay, recommendations, interview, etc.)
- What is the cost to apply?
- Is there an online application option?
- Do you accept an application from Georgia College 411 (state schools only), a school application, or the Common Application?
- What is the early action/early decision policy?
- What are deadlines for early and regular admissions?
- When are applicants notified of their admissions status?
- What is the acceptance rate?

TIPS: Campus Visit Notes



Name of College _____

Location _____ Date of Visit _____

Contacts (*Admissions/financial aid staff, professors, students*)

Campus Facilities (*Academic buildings, dorms, dining, recreational facilities, town/city setting*)

Student Life (*Entertainment, cultural events, recreation/sports, clubs/activities, social/service organizations*)

Academics (*programs of study, professors in major, libraries, study abroad, internships, special programs*)



Overall Impressions

What did you like best?

What did you like least?

Other facts to remember about this college



*Source:
Mill Creek High
Counselor Marcia Arnold*