

All About Campus Visits

When to visit:

Before applying - Ideally, students should visit a wide variety of schools before applying. Learning about options and what feels like a fit allows students to feel confident about submitting applications.

When classes are in session – Visiting during schools’ sessions provides a more accurate feel for the campus rhythm in public spaces. It may also allow an opportunity to visit classes. Mondays through Thursdays can work best.

When your school is not in session - School holidays, Spring Break, and Summertime are the most common times to visit. Many high school holidays fall on Mondays. Consider visiting in late summer or early fall. Many colleges begin in mid-August, and there may be holidays that could work for you in September and October. Spring break of the junior year is an excellent time to visit schools you are considering for an early action or early decision application. It is important not to miss too many schools days while searching for a college. After all, for most students, the academic record is the most important part of an application.

After You've Been Accepted – Many students visit right before making the enrollment decision. Colleges host informative celebration events in the spring allowing students to make comparisons among their top choices. May 1 is the universal decision date for non-binding decision plans.

When not to go:

Avoid College breaks, reading days and exam weeks - Check with colleges to try to avoid these dates if at all possible. Saturday and Sunday visits are often limited. Check online visit calendars for details. Sometimes it simply isn't possible to avoid these times, and if appointments are available, it may be better to visit than to not visit, even if the timing isn't ideal.

Where to visit:

Sample local colleges – Getting a feel for types of colleges is helpful in putting together a college list. Take advantage of schools within driving distance, even if you suspect they will not make the final list. This is especially helpful for younger high schoolers beginning to think about colleges.

Visit schools in every selectivity range – The biggest mistake students make is visiting only the most selective schools of interest. It is not a good idea for any student, regardless of credentials, to visit only schools that admit less than 15% of their applications. In many cases, discovering schools they like that have great opportunities and higher acceptance rates reduces stress during application season.

Visit schools with programs of interest – Use Naviance/Family Connection (email us for your login if you need it), the College Board's Big Future site and individual college websites to search for schools offering programs of interest. In the early part of high school, it is not necessary to have an approved college visit list from the counseling office. Explore all types of schools which will allow for valuable insight when meeting with your college counselor at the beginning of junior year. At that time a comprehensive research list will be created by college counselors which can guide your visits.

Consider visiting in reverse “favorite” order – You will zero in on things you care about the more you visit, so save schools you think are your favorites for last. You’ll have a better knowledge base for evaluating, and you’ll be more confident about your visit.

Preparing for the visit:

Engage your student in the planning – It is important that students have a say in where they visit. Pay attention to your child’s readiness for a visit. Some sophomores aren’t ready, some (few) freshman are. A student determined not to visit, will make sure that visit is not successful. At the same time, encourage them to be open to schools they think they will not like. Surprises happen.

Schedule official appointments – Contact college admission offices or schedule through online reservation systems to register for information sessions and tours with as much advanced notice as possible. Second semester juniors may want to schedule an interview, though most offices are not ready to interview students until the summer after the junior year. Ask about opportunities to sit in on classes or if a student is particularly academically focused, ask to meet with a professor. If you wait until the last minute, though, you may not be able to register for events during peak times, but if you visit anyway, stop by the admission office and ask to be added to the mailing list. You want to make sure colleges know you were there.

Seniors: Some schools sponsor overnight hosting programs where your child can stay with a current student. This is a great opportunity to get a deeper sense of campus life and interact with their potential future friends and roommates. Make sure to bring a sleeping bag and a toothbrush!

Plan out logistics – Map out schools of interest and plan reasonable trips. Never visit more than two schools a day and ideally visit only one allowing for exploration of surrounding areas. Plan out parking, meals, and snack breaks. Take water bottles and snacks. Factoring in travel time, information sessions, and tours often cover lunch times. Well-fed and watered students have more productive visits.

During the visit:

Let the student take charge – Your child should check in at the front desk. Allow your child to interact the way he or she wants. Some students will ask lots of questions, most won’t. Beyond gentle encouragement, it’s best to hang back. Many will be nervous and not respond well to guidance. Don’t take it personally and remain positive. There’s nothing more uncomfortable than a public meltdown moment. Keep your questions to a minimum; you can always call later. Or consider taking separate tours and comparing notes later. There is a natural push and pull coming from your child, and you’ll likely feel like a yo-yo. With more visits and gained confidence, it will get easier.

Prepare for an interview – Your child should bring a copy of his/her resume to give to the interviewer. Dress should be nice but comfortable for the other activities. No one expects a student to wear a suit or high heels for this admission interview. Juniors and seniors can schedule practice interviews by contacting Ms. Chounet. Research brochures and websites and come armed with thoughtful questions.

Don’t overgeneralize – You may not connect with the tour guide or presenter. Pay attention to the content and try to get a sense of other students on campus.

Explore on your own - Ask a current student where the best place to eat is and have lunch there. Visit the library. Check out the gym or the theater. Find spots on campus where students gather; hang out there and get a feel for the character of the college. Asking for directions is the best way to connect informally with real students

and a free flowing and informative conversation may follow. Walk or drive around the surrounding areas to get a feel for what it's like.

Consider alternative plans for siblings – If this is a family trip, try to plan alternative events for younger siblings if possible. All will appreciate it!

Be flexible – If it looks like a visit is headed south (i.e. your child is not interested), consider taking the tour only or exploring a little on your own. Inevitably there will be one reaction you will not understand or expect. It's okay to change plans.

Remain positive – Sometimes admission presentations scare students, particularly at highly selective schools. Remind your student that you have faith the process will work out well, no matter where he or she goes and be sure to manage your own anxiety if you find yourself overwhelmed by admission statistics. Your child will have options!

Go easy on the debrief – Visiting a college can take a lot out of students. Many are nervous and anxious about whether they will be admitted, particularly if they really like the school. Give them space to think about it and try to listen carefully to what they do say. It's best to keep much of your feedback to yourself. There will come a time when they will want your thoughts. This draining time is likely not it.

What to do after a visit:

Write down impressions – When visiting schools, it is easy for them to blend together. After each visit, encourage your child to write down impressions, additional questions, highlights, favorite programs and the names of anyone with whom you have met. These notes will be very helpful when preparing supplemental essay responses and the “Why this college essay.” Parents may also want to keep notes of children's reactions. Time may blur their impressions and being able to share their initial thoughts may prove helpful. Photos are worth a thousand words.

Send thank you notes – Be sure to thank anyone with whom they have met. Gather business cards from admission representatives, faculty, or student interviewers or tour guides when possible. Most students miss out on this opportunity to set themselves apart.

Why visit?

Gain personalized insight - No website, guidebook or testimonial will give you a better feel for a school. Many students change their minds about a college, both positively and negatively after a visit.

Demonstrate interest – Many colleges track demonstrated interest and factor it into their admission decisions. They know that students who have visited matriculate at higher rates and therefore are more likely to admit promising candidates who have visited.

Build lasting memories – Before you know it you will be driving away from campus having just unpacked your son or daughter for freshman orientation. High school students are busier than ever and taking time to visit schools may provide coveted together time. Make it fun and low pressure, and you'll all look back on it fondly.

Before visiting a college investigate the information in the school brochure or Website. Upon completion of your visit, write your responses to the following issues. Do this for each college visited, and you will be able to compare your summaries for each.

College or University: _____ Location: _____

Date of Visit: _____ Interviewer: _____

Student Body (Impression of student body in terms of appearance, style, friendliness, degree of interest and enthusiasm, diversity of social, religious, and ethnic background.)

Academic Factors (How serious about academics is the college and its students; how good are the facilities for academic pursuits; how varied is the curriculum; how strict or flexible are the requirements; how appropriate is the college for your interests?)

Campus Facilities and Social Life (How complete and modern are the facilities, such as dorms, library, Internet system, student center, athletic complex; how active is the social life; how diverse is it; is it a suitcase or commuter campus?)

Overall Impressions (What did you like least and most; what seemed different or special. What type of student do you feel would be happiest there? Are you the type?)

Rating (On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the top grade, rate the college based on your interest in it.) _____