

College Visits

“One look is worth a thousand words.”

~Fred R. Barnard

Once you have a list of colleges that seem to match your criteria on paper, it is time to hit the road and visit them. Each college campus has its own personality and it is highly recommended you visit to see how well it matches yours. We cannot tell you how many times students have come back from a college they really liked on paper and then listed all the things that they did not like about it in person. Then, there are many times that students visit a college not even on their list or last on their list, only to find that they loved it when they visited! It is a unique experience for everyone. Although your intuition will be important as you walk around campus, there are still many things you need to do to get the most out of your college visit. After all, this is a place where you will be spending A LOT of time over the next two or four years, and you wouldn't buy a car without test driving it, would you?

There are many things that you can do on a campus visit – sometimes so many things that you may want to go back a time or two to really get a feel for the college. Obviously, this is easier the closer the college is to you but no matter the distance, we still recommend that you visit. Something to consider if you are saying that you can't afford to visit a school on your list: If you can't afford to visit now, how will you be able to afford to come home for holiday breaks (the dorms are usually closed), or for an important weekend? These are all things to consider when looking at colleges.

OK, before you just hop in the car and start visiting, do some planning.

Things to Consider When Planning Your Visits and Interviews

- Visit even if you are undecided about a major.
- Go onto each college's website and see if they have Open House Dates or Tour Times listed (probably on the Undergraduate Admissions or Prospective Students page).
- Does the college require an interview?
- Are two of your schools close enough to each other to visit in one day or at least over two days with just one night away?
- Do you want to sit in on a class or meet individually with anyone on campus i.e. an Admissions Counselor, Financial Aid Advisor, Coach (see pg 38 for NCAA info), Faculty Member or Department Head for your major?

- Would you like to visit while school is in session? We would recommend this to really get a sense of the campus and the type of students who attend.
- Do you want to stay overnight if dorm overnights are available?
- Keep in mind that some schools will keep track of any and all contacts with them, including visits, interviews, college fair conversations, and if you attend the college's visit to the high school to gauge your interest in their school.

Take all of these things into consideration when planning your trip and length of stay. Know the answers to those questions before you call/sign-up for a tour, open house, interview time or overnight date. Also, realize that Open Houses are for the masses. Many students visit colleges on Open House days so there may be a limited amount of time (if allowed at all) for interviews, individual appointments, etc. on those particular days. They are however good for you and your parent(s) to get a wealth of information from a variety of different departments such as admissions, financial aid, the department that your major is included under, etc.

So, once you have the date and times of all your campus appointments, then you just sit back and wait, right? NO!

Be Prepared for Your Visit and/or Interview

- Keep doing research, or at least organize the research you already have done on the school(s) you are visiting. Use the College Comparison Worksheet (*) to help you to do this. Think about what will help you feel comfortable on a campus. This will be easier after you visit a couple of schools for comparison – so take every opportunity to visit a college, even it is for your older brother, sister, cousin or friend or just because it is close to home!
- Before you go, look again at the catalog and online, especially at the sections on admission requirements, tuition, programs of study, and scholarships. This prevents you from asking questions that are already answered somewhere else. There are things that you should ask on your visit/interview and things you shouldn't have to ask! Doing a little "homework" before your interview shows that you have done some serious thinking and reading about this particular college.
- Do some reading about the major(s) that attract(s) you to this college.
- Don't be afraid to bring a list of written questions for your visit and also for your interview. It's a good way to impress!