



Thoughts and Tips for Visiting College Campuses

Providence Academy College Counseling

The campus visit tends to be one of the greatest factors for the college choice. A visit can help to cement impressions of the spirit, personality, and texture of a college in a way that statistics, guidebook entries, or the college's marketing collateral cannot.

It is almost never too early to visit a college campus. The college counselors strongly recommend that students complete an official admissions tour and information session on at least one (preferably more) college campus prior to winter of Grade 11. Visits taken before winter of Grade 11 are more about establishing baselines and gaining exposure to different types of campuses. The more focused phase for visiting campuses typically begins in the fall of Grade 11 and for most students will continue into the summer and fall of Grade 12.

College Visit Instructions and Tips

When to visit: You will hear people say that you should try to visit colleges when school is in session. There is good sense behind this recommendation, because you can experience what the campus feels like in the most complete way. However, for most students it is simply not possible to visit all the campuses you will need to see without using the summer months. There are also advantages to summer visits. Tours will typically be smaller than in the spring and fall, and it is easier to meet with admission staff to get questions answered. It is also usually easier to organize your family for college trips during the summer months.

Avoid Saturday visits as much as possible. They are generally the busiest visitor days for admission offices, and tours can be very large. You will find the smallest tours and information sessions on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Designated "Open House" days can be desirable because of the extended admissions programming offered, but on the other hand they will usually be busier and much less personalized.

Schedule a visit - nearly all colleges have a visit calendar and sign-up system on their admissions website. Check the online calendar (or call admissions) before scheduling your trip. You will want to verify the tour and session times; there may also be days when either information sessions or tours are not being offered for whatever reason. The official campus tour is always worth your time. Never attempt to see more than two campuses in a day – and try to stick to seeing just one, leaving plenty of time to wander around.

Stay an hour or two beyond the scheduled admissions tour. No official tour covers the entire campus, and it makes sense that the admission staff organizes the tours to highlight mostly what is new or desirable. Drive ten minutes in every direction from the campus – after all, this will become *your* neighborhood if you enroll. Especially at colleges without a formal religious affiliation, religious life is likely not to be discussed in detail on the tour. To learn about Catholic life, look up the Catholic student center (Newman Center) before your trip to see if there is a priest-chaplain or campus minister who could meet with you. Ask if there are faculty members who are active within the Catholic community. These are people you may want to speak with, as they may have a longer term perspective about the religious climate on campus and among the faculty (particularly if it is a secular institution).

Ask for everything that might be helpful, but assume nothing. It never hurts to ask for perks such as a dining hall pass, a recreation center pass, meeting professors from your intended major, visiting a class, or sitting down with the admissions officer who works with Minnesota applicants. These requests might be declined depending on the college, the time of year, or their visit policies. Overnight residence hall stays tend to be reserved for seniors, and at some colleges are for admitted students only. If you are visiting after the end of Grade 11, ask if you need to schedule an admissions interview.

For the information you most want to know, ask it everywhere you go, and of everyone you meet. One issue with campus tours is that the students conducting them have a great deal of latitude to choose what they say (and not all if it may be correct). Having information from more than one source reduces the chance that you will receive

partial, skewed or inaccurate information. Be bold and do not be afraid to approach students who do not work for admissions to ask about their impressions of the college. Figure out what is *your* question.

Trust your gut, but don't rush to judgment. Sometimes you just know that you have found the right place, even if you cannot fully express why. That said, try not to rule out a school because of bad weather or a boring class. There are bound to be sunny days and more interesting classes. Likewise, remember that if you stay overnight, your host may be very different from you, but the school could still be a great fit for you both.

What to Ask or Notice When Visiting a College

Remember: you must take notes when visiting colleges or you will never remember what you saw there. Be precise and think ahead about your questions. Here are some ideas:

General Questions

- Ask students – what has surprised you about this place?
- How does this college prepare students for careers? Are there any innovative approaches and opportunities in place? When is it expected that students begin to use career advising resources?
- Ask students – is there a type of student or person that you wish was more represented on campus?
- Ask admissions – what is this college's *story*? Why was it founded? Why is it still here?
- Is having a car critical? Are there options to arrive to the campus by bus, shuttle, or train?

Academic Questions

- Notice - is the library crowded? What academic events or talks are advertised on the bulletin boards?
- Ask students – who taught you in your first year and how large were your classes? Who grades your exams and papers? When you need help, does it come from the professor or a teaching assistant?
- Ask students – what was your best and your most disappointing experience with a professor?
- Ask students – how often are you unable to register for a course you need or want to take?
- Ask students – did you, or do you plan to, study abroad? How difficult is it to be accepted into the programs and to make the arrangements (academic, financial, or otherwise)?
- Ask faculty or a reference librarian – what types of assignments do professors give, and how prepared are students to tackle them? How engaged are students in their learning?
- Ask admissions/faculty – how can a student get to do research and how common is this?
- Ask admissions/faculty – is there an honor code? How does it work, and is it taken seriously?

Student Life Questions

- Notice – are students sitting together in common areas? Are the groups mixed in nature, or not?
- Notice – how are students dressed for their normal academic day? Does the prevailing style suit you?
- Notice – do students leave their belongings in public areas and then return to them later?
- Ask students – what did you do last weekend? What are your plans for the coming weekend? (*These specific questions yield more helpful answers than asking a more general question about 'what students do on weekends'*)
- Ask students – is it possible to contribute to a range of extracurricular activities, or do most students specialize and form their friend group mainly from one or two of their interests?
- Ask students – (if relevant) how important is Greek life? When is rush and how is it conducted?
- Ask students – are certain nights “party time?” Where do students tend to gather – in on-campus spaces, or in off campus houses?
- Ask students – what is the condition of the residence halls (that are not seen on tour)?
- Ask students – are athletic events popular? How about concerts, plays or lectures?
- Ask students – what is available off campus and do students go to those places? How do they get there?