



Making the most of college visits

“Can’t I just take a virtual tour online?”

While a virtual tour is a great way to begin the college search, there’s a difference between how a campus looks and feels in real life versus how it appears in a brochure or on the Web. By visiting in person, you can:

- get a feel for that school’s distinct vibe, and a first-hand look at college facilities
- talk with professors and students face to face
- view the surrounding area

TIP

Many schools no longer plan interviews, though they’ll answer your questions on the phone. Ask admissions for the name of a school representative in your area. These are often graduates of the college who volunteer to talk with prospective students and their families and answer questions. And don’t be afraid to offer information about your strengths that will help your interviewer know you better.

When to go

Your goal is to meet students and faculty, so plan to visit when the college is in session. Spring of junior year and late summer (after college classes resume) or early September of your senior year are great times to visit.

Arranging the visit

Schedule your visit online or by phone ahead of time. Try to be on campus during the week so you can see college life in action and perhaps stay overnight in the dorm.

- Sign up for a tour and an info session, arrange to sit in on a class, and set up meetings with faculty or coaches if desired. Will the college provide overnight accommodations or a meal?
- For questions about college financing, make an appointment with the financial aid office.
- Talking with the admissions office can show the college that you’re interested in the school and can give you insight on campus life. If a school you’re considering still holds admissions interviews, think of it as a conversation—an opportunity for you to get an inside look at the college and for the admissions folks to know more about you. Prepare questions ahead of time. Then relax and be yourself!

Once you’re on campus

- Take a student-led tour. Ask guides what they like and dislike about the college.
- Talk to students and faculty members. Chat with students you meet, admissions and financial aid staff, and faculty and coaches. Find out all you can!
- Walk around by yourself to get a feel for the campus, taking in the surroundings and student vibe. Do you like the buildings and the campus layout? Think about what the campus will be like in different seasons. Can you picture yourself there for four years?
- Inquire about the social scene. Do students stay on campus or go away on weekends? How much of a role does Greek life (sororities and fraternities) play on campus?
- Check out the nearest town. Can you walk there? What transportation is available? Where are the closest parks, grocery stores, coffee houses, restaurants, or malls? Do you like the area? Will you be able to continue to do the activities you enjoy?

Once you're on campus

residence halls How are they set up? Are first-year students separated or with upper-class students? Are there options for special-interest housing? What are the bathrooms like?

student center Are students hanging out or studying there? What facilities are available? What about coffee shops or other eateries?

dining hall(s) How many are there? When are they open? What are the meal plan options? Sample the food!

sports or other facilities How state-of-the-art are the facilities? Who's using them? What hours are they open?

library How big is it, and how are study areas organized? Are online resources/databases easily accessible?

computer lab Are the computers up-to-date? Are lab techs available for trouble-shooting? Are there any special programs for buying a computer as an incoming student?

science labs What equipment is available for undergraduate use?

campus bookstore What can you buy? How expensive is it? What hours is it open?

health center/medical office How close is it to the dorms? What is the typical wait time for treatment?

career planning office What resources are available? Help with internships or part-time work for undergraduates? Tutoring or support services? Job guidance for graduates?

art/music studios and galleries What is displayed? Who is using the space?

TIP

Bottom line:

Seeing is believing. Visit, without your friends. Eat in the dining halls, attend a class, read bulletin boards, and talk with current students. Ask yourself: Can I see myself living here? Go with your instinct. Better to find that out now that a college isn't for you rather than when you're moving into the dorm. And don't let where your friends are going shape your decision. This is about you, not them.

Questions to ask admissions officers, tour guides, or students

- What makes this college unique?
- What are the smallest and largest class sizes?
- How many classes are taught by a teacher's assistant (TA)? By a professor?
- How competitive is the school academically? In sports?
- How does academic advising work?
- What day trips or weekend excursions do students take? Are weekend activities offered on campus?
- What clubs/student groups exist?
- How are student housing decisions made? Are students required to live on campus? Is housing guaranteed? Does the college or university lease off-campus housing for students or is it all through private individuals?
- What are the options for freshman housing, orientation programs, and special first-year student trips or seminars?
- Are first-year students permitted to have cars on campus? What other types of transportation are available?
- What employment and work-study options are available?
- What percentage of graduates get jobs within six months of graduation?
- How effective is campus security?