

# Everything You Wanted to Know about COLLEGE VISITS: Where to Go, Who to Talk to, What to Ask

You wouldn't buy a car without at least looking at it first. Why would you pick a place to live without visiting it first? If you can, visit every school you are considering. Choosing a school that is a good home for you is in large part instinctive. How do you feel when you are there? That and getting answers to some questions should help you find a good match. What are you looking for?

## Start here:

1. Visit early and as often as possible. Go when classes are in session to get a feel for the students and the atmosphere, not just a look at the buildings. The special visit recruitment events are great for gathering information, but it won't give you a realistic view of life there as a student.
2. Check online to see what is possible. You may call the school's Admissions Office ahead of time to schedule a tour, meal, and visits to a class and on campus housing. You can arrange appointments with the financial aid office, an advisor/professor/department head in your major. See if you can spend the night on campus, if possible.
3. Check into the admissions office and introduce yourself. Some schools will let you visit with an admissions rep during your visit. If this is possible, be sure to do it. Take the campus tour. Remember the tour and guides are carefully prepared to show the best parts, so go out and see the parts they don't show you on your own.
4. Plan some free time to walk around the campus before or after the tour. Watch the people you see. Listen to their conversations. Are they talking about lectures or the soaps on daytime TV? At larger colleges, look for a bus that drives students around campus. The driver is usually a student who is probably willing to talk about the school. You have a captive audience full of first hand knowledge with no reason to be anything but honest with you. If students have a problem with the school they will probably tell you. If they love their school, they won't be shy about it either. Specific questions yield far more interesting and helpful answers.
5. Pick up any official school material you see such as brochures and scholarship information. Don't forget to get business cards too so you will have a real live contact if you have a question about admissions or financial aid. Get a school newspaper and look around for activity calendars. Check out bulletin boards to see what bands are coming to campus, internships are posted and generally what the day-to-day energy of the place is like.
6. When do you go? Start anytime, but see your top choices in junior and senior year. Visit when classes are in session. You're picking a culture, and a style, not the buildings. Although summer and weekends are the most convenient for you, it is not the best time to see the campus under typical circumstances.
7. What schools do you visit? Compare a large, urban university to a small, rural college. If you're after a public college in Texas, look at UT, A & M, U of H and compare to Southwest Texas in San Marcos, Sam Houston in Huntsville, and Stephen F. Austin in Nacogdoches. Which type of school feels more comfortable to you?
8. What do you look for when on campus? Schools have very definite personalities. See if you can get a feel for what that is and try to picture yourself living there. These ideas might help:
  - Ask your tour guide or students you meet about their personal experiences. If the guide says there are 70 organizations on campus, ask which ones he or she belongs to. If they tell you the average number of students per class, ask how many students are in his or her classes. If they say the school has over 500 computers for student use, ask them if they and most of their friends have their own computer. Ask how many times they have been turned away from the computer center because they are full or closed. Get the idea?
  - Take notes. I know you don't want to, but if you visit several schools, they will quickly blur together. Keep track of what you liked and what you didn't like. When it comes to decision time, you will be glad you did.

- When you go into a class building, survey the class sizes. Is there discussion or lecture going on in the rooms?
- Be sure you see freshmen residence halls and take notes. Ask if the college requires freshmen to live on campus. Research shows that is a good idea. Look at rooms if possible. If the school won't arrange a tour, ask students to show you their rooms. If the halls are coed, is it by wing, floor or every other room? If the floor is coed, what about the bathrooms? Are some halls known for partying, studying, or other important things you should know?
- Ask about these things from the people who have the best perspective on the subject. If you want to know about social life, ask a student, not the admissions officer.
  - + What is the role of athletics in campus life? Do students go to games or not?
  - + Do most people belong to fraternities and sororities? Are most of the social activities built around this?
  - + What does the college offer in extracurricular activities? Think about what you are interested in and passionate about and see if there are activities to support your interests. If you like to hike, do you really want an urban campus?
  - + If the school makes use of graduate students as teaching assistants, find out what percentage of freshman required classes are taught by graduate students.
  - + Ask hard questions of students. Do you feel safe walking around campus at night? Drive around the area surrounding the campus and see your neighbors. What is the availability and extent of faculty advising? What happens to the campus on weekends? Does it empty out, or is there plenty to do? Don't be afraid to ask any question you have.
  - + At large state universities, be sure to ask about early deadlines to secure freshman housing. What are the application and financial aid deadlines?
  - + Ask where students go off campus to eat, shop and socialize. Go there if you have time and see what you think.
  - + Talk to as many students as possible.

#### **MORE IDEAS:**

- When you leave, make sure there is someone (an advisor, professor, recruiter, department head, etc.) who you know and who knows who you are. Maintain contact with the person(s) you have met. Don't monopolize their time. If you are brief, they should be willing to speak with you.
- More selective schools may wish to have an interview with you when you visit. Dress for the interview. It is not solely to judge your acceptability to admissions, but it is never a bad idea to make a good impression. It is a good opportunity to learn about the school. Ask your questions too.
- Dress comfortably and make sure everyone with you is ready for a lot of walking. The best way to experience a campus is on foot, up close with lots of contact with students.

#### **For more information, see these articles on the web:**

<http://www.princetonreview.com/college/college-visit.aspx>

<http://www.princetonreview.com/college/after-college-visit.aspx>

<http://www.mystudentedge.com/crc/code/article.asp?id=1452&product=rc&sponsor=19273>

<http://www.mystudentedge.com/crc/code/article.asp?id=1394&product=rc&sponsor=19273>

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/csearch/college-visits/72.html>