

The College Visit

Ask yourself:

"Do the students here look like me?" "Can I picture myself fitting in?"

"Are the facilities updated and in good condition?"

"Am I getting a vibe that makes me feel connected to this place?"

Do your homework before you visit: Don't waste your time or the college's time. Make sure every college you visit is worthy. Determine whether you feel comfortable with the school academically; do they have a wide range of majors and minors that interest you? Is this a place where you will be challenged but not overwhelmed?

Take advantage of being in the driver's seat: Colleges are all about getting you to apply to increase the size of their applicant pool. You can count on the admissions office painting an idyllic picture of life on their campus. Make colleges earn the privilege of making it to your final list. Ask questions that challenge them to dig a little deeper.

Sit in on a class, talk with a counselor in the career center, meet with a professor or coach: These kinds of activities allow you to get to know the college on a much more intimate level. After having any of these experiences students frequently walk away from a campus visit knowing they either love or hate the college.

Make an appointment with the chair of the department of your potential major(s)

If you have any inkling whatsoever about what your major in college might be, you should certainly make an appointment to meet briefly with the Department Chair during your college visit. They'll be thrilled to meet a potential major, because more students equals more money for their department, and you'll get some valuable insight into the courses you'd take, professors you'd study under, and academic opportunities that your school and potential major will offer. Don't hesitate to schedule several of these meetings, especially if you're unsure about your potential major.

While in the classroom...

If you think you can ace exams without ever going to class, think again. Not only do you need to go to class once in a while to make sure you're up to speed with what's going on with exams and homework, but a lot of smaller classes also base some of their grades on participation. Granted, you can miss class once in a while, but don't forget that attendance is often mandatory. Make sure that you like the classroom setting of the school you're visiting. Are they big or small? Are they flat or stadium-style? Is the technology adequate, or better yet, very advanced? Will you be a nameless face or someone your teacher will be able to interact with?

If an interview is included:

While you're on your campus visit, why not put a face to your application? Make an appointment to meet with an admission counselor so that they can get to know you as more than a list of test scores and activities. This is your chance to show your personality, and you can even use the time to ask any questions that you might still have about the school. Just be sure that you're friendly, polite, and articulate, because the first impression is a lasting one.

Grab a cup of coffee with current students: Sitting down with students and chatting is a great way to gain a better understanding of the college. Ask them: "What do you like best/worst about your college?" "Where else did you apply/get accepted?" "Why did you choose to come here?" "What do you do on a typical weekend?" "What should I know that is not in the shiny view book?" Current students are almost always willing to share their insights. Students have frequently shared with me that these conversations had more of an impact than anything else.

Spend the night in a dorm: If your child has friends at the college, it's easy to make arrangements. If you don't know any current students and your child is willing to stay overnight, contact the admissions office a few weeks in advance.

Read the student newspaper and listen to the college radio station.

Check out the bulletin boards for club activities and school wide events.

Wander around the campus on your own.

Check out the Quad and hangout hotspots

Since you can't make friends staying in your dorm room all day, you'll find yourself out on the quad (or a comparable hangout spot) quite often. Your school should have a nice lawn to read on and an open area to play football or frisbee. If this doesn't exist—and comparable common areas can be found on urban campuses too!—or if it does and there's nobody there, this might be a school you want to rethink. You'll be surprised how important little things like playing catch with your buddies in between classes will factor into your enjoyment of school.

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Dining halls

The dining hall is the simplest and most efficient way to eat on campus. The average student will eat at the cafeteria twice a day; it's possible you go a bit less, but it's likely you go even more than that, whether for a snack or late-night meal. Be certain that the cafeterias are large, clean, provide a variety of quality foods, and are readily accessible. If the campus is big, chances are the school will have multiple dining halls; make sure you see them all.

Health center

Should you get sick or injured and are in need of anything from emergency care to DayQuil, it's always reassuring to know you have access to top-quality medical care and technology. Visit the Health Center and see what they have to offer students

Gym/on-campus athletic facilities

If you're interested in getting into or staying in shape, make sure your college has a state-of-the-art gym. If you're into college athletics, the school's on-campus facilities are also something you should check out. The games on campus can be a pretty big draw, and even if you're not a huge sports fan they double as a popular social event.

Financial Aid Office

Go and inquire about scholarships, grants, loans

Take notes!

It's easy to get mixed up if you visit multiple colleges. Use our College Comparison Chart.(available in guidance) Keep an organized file to keep all of the details straight.

Questions to ponder and to ask students, professors and admissions:

Do the students look happy?
How are the students dressed?
Are the students approachable?
What do you notice when you look into a classroom?
What do you notice when you look into the professors' offices?
What do the buildings and grounds tell you about the college?
What makes this college special?
What big issues are being debated on campus? (newspaper/posters)
What else can you learn from the student newspaper?
How large are the first year/ introductory classes?
How is the food in the cafeteria?
What are the dorms like?
What can you learn about the activities you might want to pursue?
How far away from the academic buildings are the dorms?
What is a typical course load for first year students?
How easy/difficult is it to change your major?
What courses are required?
How many students graduate in 4 years? In 5 years?
Do professors teach all classes?
Do students help evaluate professors?
Is there an honor code? Does it work?
What can you learn about the school spirit and support of a team you might be part of?
How diverse is the student body? The faculty?
What % of students live on campus?
How many freshmen share a room?
Is there an advising system in place? How does it work?
Does the campus feel safe? What is its safety record?
How much homework can you expect as a first year freshman?
What do students do on the weekend?
Are fraternities and sororities big on the campus?
What are the art facilities like?
What happens to financial aid after your first year?
What are the athletic facilities like?
What opportunities are there for student research?
How strong are your internships?
Do you have study abroad programs?
How accessible are labs?
What % of freshmen receives financial aid?
Are merit scholarships available?
What are the most popular majors?
What happens to the graduates? Where do they go? What do they do?
Ask a student: "If you could change one thing about this school, what would it be?"