

College Visits

- [College Visit form.](#)
 - Would you buy a car without taking it for a test drive? Or would you even buy an outfit without trying it on? Probably not, right? Whenever you buy something it's always a good idea to make sure that it works and that it's right for you.
 - As you prepare to make one of the biggest purchases and most important investments of your life, it's a good idea to keep this in mind. Visiting is the way that you try a college out and take it for a spin. It's one of the first steps in finding the school that's right for you.
- PRE-PLANNING
 - As visiting a school is one of the first steps in choosing your college, it should be approached with some thought and planning. Because you will probably be visiting more than one college in a short period of time - often several during one trip - it's a good idea to prepare for your college visits. To guide you through this often stressful (but fun and exciting) process, we've put together some tips:
 - Before you begin visiting colleges, you need to come up with a list of schools that interest you. You should talk with your guidance counselor, teachers, coaches, parents and friends to get some ideas. Then do some research. Guidebooks and college and university web sites are excellent sources. Call each college's admissions office and request information about the school and any particular programs in which you are interested. Take a look and make a pile of the colleges or universities that catch your eye. From these resources you should be able to start to make a list of the schools that interest you the most.
- WISE VISITS
 - The next step is to start thinking about visiting some schools. You can approach college visits in a couple of different ways. Many students will visit several schools before deciding where to apply, whereas other students will visit a few schools at first (often those closest to home) and wait for acceptance letters before visiting others.
 - There's not a right or wrong way to do this. It depends on what works best for you and your family. If you are looking primarily at out-of-state institutions, for example, visiting several schools before filing applications simply may not be possible.
 - Deciding when to visit is also important. For convenience, many families will visit schools in the summer, often planning visits around a family vacation. Summer visits will allow you to get a sense of the campus and the location of the school.
 - "Pictures in viewbooks can be deceiving," says Meghan Kahn, a senior psychology major at Alfred University. "You really need to visit to get a sense of the campus and what the location has to offer. Summer is a good time to do this,

but you'll probably want to come back during the school year to get a feel for the people."

- Visiting during the school year will allow you to get a sense of the entire place. You will be able to see and interact with the people who will be your teachers and classmates. Ideally it is good to visit a school more than once, and many students will visit several times before making a final decision.
- You'll also need to decide what kind of visit you'd like to make. Some students and families like to visit schools without making an appointment. This allows them to explore and get a sense of the college or university on their own. Although this can work well, if you want to meet with a member of the admissions or financial aid staff or a professor, it's probably best to call the college's admissions office ahead of time and make an appointment. If you have limited time, this is probably the best way to make sure that you see and do all that you want.

- TYPES OF VISITS

- When you call, you can ask what types of visits are available. In general, colleges and universities offer Open Houses, weekday and Saturday visits. An Open House provides an excellent opportunity to get an overview of the institution. In most cases you will have a chance to meet with faculty members, students, members of the admissions and financial aid staff and coaches. Often these programs include campus tours, specific facility tours and lunch in the dining hall.
- A downside to these programs is that they tend to be large with group tours and group information sessions. A weekday or a Saturday visit generally involves a campus tour, an admissions interview or information session and a meeting with a financial aid counselor.
- Many schools will also accommodate requests to attend classes, meet with faculty members or coaches, or tour special facilities. However, each institution does things a little differently and it's a good idea to find out as much as possible about what they offer when you call to make an appointment.
- You may want to ask a few questions: Do they offer group or one-on-one tours? Do they require individual admissions interviews or general admissions information sessions? If you know what to expect, you're more likely to relax and enjoy your visit.
- Another visit option you may want to inquire about is overnight housing. Many colleges and universities offer hosting to their prospective students, which means that you could stay in the residence hall with a current student. Hanging out in a residence hall, going to classes and eating in the dining halls will give you a true taste of what you can expect as a student at that school.
- By the way, whether you stay overnight or just visit for a few hours, make sure to visit the dining hall to at least see what it offers. If you have any special diet needs, this is a good time to see if they can be met.

- ASK QUESTIONS

- Regardless of when you visit, how long you stay or with whom you talk, you should be prepared to ask questions. Many students feel as though there is a list of right questions to ask. Although you should definitely try to find out some basic information about each institution - student-to-faculty ratio, size of the college, relationship between the town and the institution, safety and placement rates, to name a few - the key is to ask questions that are important to you.
- Loren Pope, author of "Looking Beyond the Ivy League," advises, "Since every college visitor isn't looking for the same thing, the same questions won't work for everyone. The important thing is to ask the questions that deal with your particular needs."
- As you get ready to visit schools, you should think about what you are looking for in a college and the things that are important to you. You should now have some ideas about how to approach your visit. For more information, check out "Looking Beyond the Ivy League." There's a great chapter on visits.
- Also, ask your guidance counselor and older siblings and friends about what to expect and what to look for. College visits are one of the most important elements of your college search process. You should research, plan, prepare and most importantly, have fun. Happy visiting!