



The campus visit: Evaluating your options

Choosing a college is a big decision. You have many options, and making the best choice can have a positive influence on your life for years to come.

One important step in your decision-making process is to tour colleges you are considering.

Make sure you have all the information you need and know the right questions to ask to get the most out of your campus visits. These tours can help you narrow your choices and feel confident in your school selection.

This checklist can help you evaluate your options. Make copies, and take notes before and during each campus visit. Keep a folder for each school, and place this list in it, along with correspondence from each school, and any viewbooks, brochures, and other items you collect.

Gather and review as much information as you can before each visit, so you can enjoy the tour and the college exploration experience.

Before the visit

Call the college's admissions office and make arrangements.

The admissions office can help you make the most of your visit to campus. Call early in the process, and take down the names and phone numbers of those assigned to assist you with your visit.

- What are the times of campus tours and information sessions? _____

- Do you have an appointment with an admissions representative? If so, when? _____
- Is an interview with the admissions office a required part of the application process? _____
- Do you have appointments with other campus representatives, including coaches, faculty members, and financial aid officers? If so, when? _____

- Contact the alumni office for the names of alumni in your area. Ask your parents for permission to contact two or three alumni that you and your parents can meet with. Jot down their names and information here. They may serve as a source of helpful information on their alma mater.

- What time should you arrive on campus? You may need to fill out forms before taking tours or appointments. _____
- Do you have copies of your transcript and résumé? You may want to refer to these documents in conversations with campus representatives, if you have scheduled an admissions interview. _____

Ask about attending a class and experiencing “a day in the life” of a student.

Some schools encourage students to spend some time on campus on their own, attending classes, participating in a student activity, and/or even staying overnight with a host student. Find out options available to you, and take advantage of them if you can.

- Can you arrange to attend a class or two in subjects that interest you? Which ones? _____

- Can you stay overnight in a residence hall? Where? _____
- Can you eat in a campus dining hall? Which one? _____
- Will you be able to visit with one or two students studying subjects or participating in activities or organizations that interest you? Jot their names and information down here. _____

During the visit

Take a tour of the campus.

The campus tour is helpful because it gives you an opportunity to experience the environment and the interactions among students. If at all possible, take the tour when a semester is in session, and preferably mid-session, after the excitement of startup but before final exams.

- What is the condition of the buildings and facilities? _____
- Where is Internet access available on campus? _____
- What are your on-campus options for meals and snacks? _____

- What are your observations of selected recreational facilities? _____

- What are some extracurricular organizations or programs you may be interested in? _____

- What banking options do you have available on, or near, the campus? _____

- Do area businesses or organizations provide students free, discounted, or other specialized offers? Ask a representative of the student services center. _____
- Browsing through campus bulletin boards, what do you learn about academic and social activities, services, and opportunities? _____

- How do students interact with one another? What is the mood on campus? _____

- Does the campus have access to health care providers, especially in emergencies? _____

- What are your observations of some of the campus libraries? _____

- What is the proximity to services you might need (grocery store, department store)? How will you get there if you don't have personal transportation? _____

- Can the bookstore provide you with budgeting sheets or basic estimates for costs of books and supplies? _____

Visit with a student.

Visiting with a currently enrolled student can give you great insight on the campus experience. Ask your teachers and counselor if they know any students attending the college you visit that graduated from your high school. Consider also asking the school to let you speak with someone from your hometown or region, someone majoring in your program of study, and/or someone who is a sophomore or junior. Here is a list of potential questions to guide your conversation.

Ask the student to share first-year experiences.

- What do students do on weekends? _____
- What are the more popular campus activities? _____
- What are the average class sizes by school or program of study? _____
- What would the student change about the school? _____

Visit with an admissions counselor.

Admissions counselors are a great source of information for you regarding an institution's programs and the application process. An admissions representative may even be assigned to your high school and be familiar with your educational environment. Enjoy your opportunity to visit with this person and be sure to ask for a business card for your files. Here are some questions you may want to ask.

- Does the school give credits for Advanced Placement (AP) , International Baccalaureate (IB), College Level Examination Program (CLEP), dual enrollment, or concurrent enrollment work? If so, how does that help you? _____
- What are the school's and department's academic standards to remain in good standing? What support is available if you run into challenges? _____
- What are the program completion rates in the programs of study you are interested in? _____
- What about post-education career placement, job placement, and graduate school support services? What are the school's placement success rates, and what assistance is available? _____
- Will you have access to peer tutoring, peer counseling, and professional counseling services? _____
- What options do you have to study abroad? _____
- What opportunities do you have to take courses and transfer credits from other more affordable institutions during the summer, or as makeup coursework, if needed? _____
- Does the school offer programs to study on other campuses to further learning experiences (extended laboratories, summer study programs, or facilities not available on the campus)? _____
- What scholarships and internship programs are available in your program's department? _____

Stop by the financial aid office.

Pick up information about the college's financial aid process. Ask for materials on any scholarships available. Make notes about important deadlines. List below and make sure to notify your college if you have any of the following:

- What is the yearly cost of attendance? How is the cost of attendance calculated? _____
- How much does the average student who graduated owe in student loans? (This is also known as average student indebtedness.) _____
- What is the process for applying for financial aid? Don't forget to ask for sample forms. Does the school have a financial aid form in addition to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)? Is there a priority deadline? _____

- What are your responsibilities for the financial aid you receive, including requirements to remain eligible for grants and scholarships, and repayment responsibilities if you take out loans? _____

- What options do you have if you find that the financial aid package you receive won't meet your needs or existing circumstances? _____

Visit a residence hall.

If your tour does not include a stop at a residence hall, be sure to ask to see a room. Check out the security features of dorm life. Ask about meal plans and food options. Inquire about roommate pairing procedures. Make a note of any housing deadlines.

- Does the campus have any major crime issues? Make sure to ask for a copy of campus crime statistics, and a description of security, if that is available. _____
- Does the campus housing or student services office have options available for off-campus housing referrals, student crisis services, and residential support services? What are they? _____

Other considerations

- **Attend a class.** Pay attention to class size, student-professor interaction, and student interaction. If possible, secure a class syllabus to review the scope and expectations of the course.
- **Visit key student areas.** Talk to students other than the tour guide. Ask them what their most favorite and least favorite aspect of the college is, and why. Is there a large number of bikes on campus? Is there public transportation? _____
- Are there community service-based organizations? Are there nearby places of worship? Does the campus have clergy on staff? _____
- **Meet with an academic advisor or faculty member.** If you have a specific program in mind, be sure to visit with someone in that area. Ask about available study opportunities, internships, and career placement. Ask what percentage of classes is taught by teaching assistants. Although it may not be critical that you commit to any specific major or program of study, spending some time with a representative of one of the departments will give you insight into how they work, and what support may be available.

After the visit

Make notes about your visit.

- Be sure to record the name, title, phone number, and email address of campus staff and/or personnel with whom you talked.
- Write down your impressions about the aspects of the college that you liked and make notes about your possible concerns.

Send thank-you notes and follow-up letters and forms.

- If a staff member was particularly helpful during your visit, you may want to send a note of thanks to that person.

Congratulations!

Now that you have completed this form, you have a useful tool that you can use to compare this campus to others. Once you complete all of your visits, review your answers for each side-by-side, and weigh and rank your answers based on what is most important for you.

Evaluate your options alone, or work with someone you trust (a family member, high school counselor, teacher, or a friend). Once you've made your choice, keep this document to remind yourself of why you did!

Best wishes as you continue your journey to achieving a higher education.