
THE COLLEGE VISIT

Now that you have passed the midpoint of your high school career, you have been involved in many research projects. You have learned to be creative about finding information; you know that references such as encyclopedias are to be used only as preliminary sources. Regrettably, many students base their selection of colleges on information gathered from the college reference books such as Barron's, The College Handbook, Peterson's Guide, and others or through the Internet. Although these resources are useful in getting a thumbnail sketch about a college, they do not offer accurate and complete information about what a college is about.

Colleges send out reams of promotional literature including impressive viewbooks that have beautiful photographs of many aspects of campus life. Realize that this information is limited and one-dimensional; what you learn about the college is what the college chooses to put on the printed page or on its web site. By visiting, you can see firsthand what the facilities are really like, how you would fit in with the students attending that college, and if the campus and its surroundings appeal to you. It is often helpful to visit different "types" of campuses to determine what things matter to you in a college. As you visit, you may be surprised to discover things that you want—as well as things you don't want—in your college experience. Identifying this type of criteria can help you narrow down your college choices based on size, location, climate, etc. and be used to help you identify similar types of schools to those that appeal to you.

The process of selecting colleges can be compared to the process used in determining any expensive purchase. Consider what someone goes through when they are about to buy a home. Real estate agents show prospective buyers lovely photographs and literature describing homes and apartments for sale, but how many people actually buy a home sight unseen? Similarly, students can form opinions from promotional literature, but as the old cliché goes, "seeing is believing." When you consider that a college education is probably the second most expensive purchase that one will make in a lifetime, the first being that of a home, it stands to reason that there should be firsthand exposure to the potential purchase.

By visiting a college, you are giving yourself a chance to form your own opinion rather than relying on the views of:

- the college admission officer who wants to attract good students to the college, or
- enthusiastic undergraduates or alumni whose enthusiasm may be overbearing, or
- your parents, who may have an "idealized" choice of college in mind for you, or
- the media who tend to exaggerate certain features about each year's "hot" colleges, or
- a friend.

PLANNING THE COLLEGE VISIT

Colleges welcome visitors and most colleges offer regularly scheduled campus tours. Some admissions offices will even make arrangements for a comprehensive visit, including a meeting with an admissions officer, a tour of the campus, and if possible, a visit to classes, informal conversations with students and faculty, a meal in the dining hall and an overnight stay. It stands to reason that if you are traveling a distance to visit the college that you exhaust all possible means of learning all you can about the school and this packet includes worksheets to help you make the most of your visit. By following these guidelines you will be able to broaden your perspective about the colleges, as you will have had a chance to learn about the educational programs, faculty, facilities, and student body. You will have felt the "spirit" of the college you have visited.

If a college is within easy traveling distance it is even more important that you plan a visit to the campus. Taking the time to visit the college is an indication of your interest. If you live close to a college and don't visit, some colleges may presume a lack of interest on the part of the student. Many colleges record the contact that a student has had with the school and retain this information in their files. Any time you visit a college campus, even informally, stop by the Admissions Office to pick up literature and complete any student inquiry forms to document your interest in the school.

WHEN TO VISIT

Although it is preferable to visit a college on a weekday when classes are in session, the decision about when to visit is an individual one – based on your family's schedule, the amount of time you are able to take off from school, and other commitments. Campus tours are offered during school vacations and the summer, and even though you may not be able to get the same “pulse” as during the school year (since students and faculty will not be around), you will still be able to form a general impression about the college and its surrounding environment.

THE INTERVIEW—AN OVERVIEW

Many colleges also offer students the chance to meet with a college representative, but usually not until after April of the junior year or in the fall of the senior year. The *College Interview* offers an opportunity for an exchange of information between an interested and well-informed student and a college officer. For the representative, it is a means to get to know the student and to add to the personal and academic information that comprises the application file. For the student, the interview offers the chance to highlight individual strengths and interests and to gather additional information about the college. Different types of interviews are offered by each college, including personal interviews, group interviews and alumni interviews. An interview may be *informative* or *evaluative*, which means it may influence the admission decision.

Depending upon the policy of the college, the interview may be **required**, **recommended** or **optional**. How the college views the interview is usually stated in the section on “*Admission Information*” in the college catalogue, view book or on the web site. Before scheduling a campus visit and/or interview, be sure to review this information carefully. **This information will be covered in greater detail during the *Interview Simulation Workshop* in May.**

THE VIRTUAL VISIT AND OTHER ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES

It is not always possible or practical for students to visit all of the colleges to which they are applying. However, there are still steps you can take to reach out to the colleges that interest you.

Local Events: College fairs, school visits and local receptions are other ways for you to learn more about individual colleges. The UNIS College Fair in May brings together representatives from over 100 colleges and is an opportunity to meet admissions officers and alumni and to collect information and ask questions. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) also sponsors a college fair each spring in New York City. In the fall, more than fifty college representatives will visit UNIS to meet with small groups of students. The list of visiting colleges will be distributed in the fall when you return to school. Many colleges also organize local receptions in New York City for prospective students. These events bring together high school students from all over the metropolitan area to meet with admissions officers, current students and alumni. We encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities.

Online: Although the online virtual visit is no substitute for the real thing, it still can provide a more engaging picture of campus life than a view book. Colleges have designed their websites to provide access to numerous sources of information, including virtual campus tours using video clips or slides of different aspects of campus life, course listings, athletic programs, residential life, and links to the campus newspaper and radio station. Some colleges also provide opportunities for prospective students to email professors or current students with questions about academics and campus life.

SCHEDULING YOUR VISIT

- When you call to schedule your campus visit be prepared to ask the following questions:
 - Is the time and day you would like to visit convenient?
 - Is a reservation needed for a college tour? Information session?
 - Can materials about the college be mailed in advance?
 - Do you need to bring anything with you?

- Call the Admission Office well in advance to find out whether a reservation is needed for the campus tour. In addition to the tour it is helpful to attend a group information session, if offered. Although many guidebooks and websites may list days and times for information sessions and tours, a quick phone call to the Admissions Office will confirm that the information is correct
- Have material sent in advance of your visit to help you familiarize yourself with the college before your visit so you can have questions prepared to ask.
- Bring an unofficial copy of your transcript and test scores, as well as a short resume of your interests and achievements.
- If possible, try to schedule your visit when the college is in session.
- Look up former UNIS students attending the college and notify them of your proposed visit.
- Arrange to attend some classes and to meet with professors in your area of interest. Consider attending the same class at each college you visit to compare among the colleges you will be considering.
- Establish contact in advance with coaches or other members of the staff or faculty if you have a special talent or interest that you want the college to know about.
- Plan to spend at least half a day on each campus you visit.
- Travel directions to most colleges are available on their websites or can be sent by the Admissions Office. If you are planning to visit other colleges in the area, it is helpful to note that many Admissions Offices keep a file with directions from their school to other campuses nearby. Admissions Offices can also provide you with information on where to stay, where to eat and other area attractions.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR VISIT

- Wear **comfortable walking shoes**.
- Bring a **notebook and a pen** to record your observations and make note of any unanswered questions.
- A **camera** can help you record anything about a college that you want to be sure to remember.
- Talk to **students** you see on campus and ask questions that you cannot readily find answers for elsewhere.
 - What's it like being a student here?
 - What advice would you give an incoming freshman?
 - Where do students hang out?
 - What does the surrounding town/city have to offer?
 - What do you like and dislike about the college?
- Spend time in the **Student Center** and question students to find out what the college is really like. Remember that your campus tour guide has been trained by the Admission Office as a public relations representative of the college and may not be as honest with you as a student caught "off guard."
- Pick up a copy of the **student newspaper** and check out the **bulletin boards** around campus. This will help you get a sense of what kinds of student activities are going on around campus and also what issues are important to students.
- Tune in to the campus **radio station**.
- Are the **athletic facilities** open to all students or just members of sports teams?
- What kinds of **computer resources** are available on campus? Do most students bring their own computers? Are the dorms wired for access to the Internet and to the library?
- Is the **library** a quiet place to study or a social gathering place? Is there an interlibrary loan program if the college does not have the resources you need?
- Attend a **class**. Are the students excited about learning? Do they participate in class discussions? Does the material seem too hard? Too easy?
- Speak with **professors**. Are professors accessible to students? Do they have regularly scheduled office hours? Do they seem interested in their students?
- Are **specialized facilities** (such as art studios, science labs, music practice rooms, theater, etc.) available for use by undergraduates? By non-majors?
- Visit a **residence hall** and, if possible, arrange to stay overnight with a student host.
- Eat in the **campus dining hall**. Is the food palatable? Are there other dining options?

- If you have any health or medical concerns, visit the **student health center**.
- Visit the **campus bookstore**. In addition to textbooks and college paraphernalia, what other items are available?
- Visit the **Career Center** to find out about internship opportunities and job placement for graduates. What companies recruit on campus? For what types of jobs?

WHEN YOU TALK TO STUDENTS, ASK...

- How many hours a week do you study? Is that typical of students here?
- Are campus jobs readily available?
- Are faculty members interested in students and accessible outside of class?
- Do many students go home on weekends?
- Is the food good?
- Is it possible to study in your dorm room?
- What's the library like as a place to study? To do research?
- What do you like most about this college? Least?
- How easy is it to get the classes you want at registration?
- What is the largest class you have ever had? Smallest?
- If you had it to do over again, would you still choose this college?
- What other colleges did you apply to?

IF YOU ATTEND A CLASS, ASK YOURSELF...

- Are students interested in the material?
- Is there time for questions and discussion? Do students participate?
- Are students prepared for class?
- Am I intellectually challenged by what is taking place?
- Do I feel that the students are learning – either new facts or new ways of thinking about a subject?
- Is there a good rapport between professors and students?
- Would I feel comfortable as a student in this setting?

AS YOU TOUR THE CAMPUS, ASK YOURSELF...

- Are the older buildings in good shape?
- Are there new buildings as well as older ones?
- Is lab equipment up-to-date and plentiful?
- Are computer facilities accessible?
- Are there specialized facilities available for my interests? (such as practice rooms or art studios)
- Are rooms in residence halls pleasant? Quiet enough to study in?
- Are common areas in the residence halls attractive? Are there laundry and kitchen facilities?
- What's the cafeteria like?
- Are the grounds well kept?
- Is the setting and architecture appealing?
- What's the surrounding town or city like? Would I feel comfortable here?

COLLEGE VISIT CHECKLIST

Use this worksheet to record information and observations from each of your college visits. This will help you capture your impressions about each school while they are still fresh in your mind and will help you compare schools across common criteria.

Name of College _____
Admissions Office Address _____
Admissions Office Phone _____ Fax _____
E-mail _____ Website _____
Admissions Office Contact _____
Times of Tours _____ Times of Information Sessions _____
Interview required? _____ Arrange for interview? _____
Arrange for overnight visit? _____ Arrange to attend class? _____

PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Visit date _____ Time _____
Contact person _____

Do I have:

____ Resume ____ Unofficial transcript ____ Test scores ____ Campus map and catalog ____ Directions to campus

Reasons I am considering this college _____

Questions for tour, interview or group information session _____

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

Overall impression/feeling about the school; Might this be a place for me? _____

What I liked best about this college _____

What I liked least about this college _____

Additional information I would like to have about this college _____

Names of people I met _____

** Remember to write thank you notes, if appropriate, to admissions officers, professors, tour guides, etc.*

OBSERVATIONS BY CATEGORIES

INTELLECTUAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE COLLEGE

- What is the student attitude towards learning? Do most seem to enjoy their courses?
- Does there seem to be an active exchange of ideas outside of classrooms?
- Do the students seem to be politically or socially conscious?
- Does there seem to be a real “grind” atmosphere? Would the campus be characterized as “cut-throat” or “cooperative”?
- What are the opportunities for Independent Study, Honors Program, Co-op, Internships, Study Abroad, Exchange Program/Consortia, Independent Majors, Interdisciplinary Majors, Research?
- Do you feel you would fit in intellectually?

SOCIAL CLIMATE

- Does social life revolve around the campus or do students leave on the weekend?
- What social and cultural activities are provided by campus? Influence of the Greek system?
- What facilities are provided for socializing? Is there a Student Center?
- What range of clubs and organizations are there? Are these organizations predominantly traditional, exotic, artistic, issue oriented?
- Do the students seem friendly and willing to help?
- Is there a “typical” student? Preppy, offbeat, nondescript, clean-cut, messy?

CAMPUS LIFE

- Does the appearance of the campus please you? Are the buildings and grounds well maintained?
- What are the living arrangements for students?
 - Large dorms
 - House or College System
 - Apartments
 - Single Rooms
 - Doubles
 - Triples
 - Suites
 - Special Interest Housing
 - On-campus
 - Off-campus
 - Co-ed
 - Single sex
- After freshman year, how are students housed? Are upper-class students guaranteed housing?
- Are there limitations on visiting hours?
- Are there “quiet hours”? Can you study in your room? Where do most people study? Is there adequate living space?
- Is dining centralized or decentralized? What dining options do students have?
 - Weekly meal plans
 - Dietary options
 - Hours of meal service
 - Quality and tastiness of food



LCHS College Visitation Policy

Lynchburg-Clay High School encourages college visitations by students and parents. Generally speaking, before time and money are spent on college applications, at least one thorough visit of a college should be made.

Juniors and seniors are permitted up to three school days for visits, which will not be counted as absences from school. However, the proper procedure must be followed.

The student must be within the established limits of permissible absences. A signed College Visitation Form (available in the guidance office) **must be turned in at least one school day prior** to the planned absence. Following the visit, the student must bring a note from the college admission or financial aid office attesting to the visit (most colleges have a form prepared for this purpose). See below for suggestions to make your visits as productive as possible.

Getting the Most from Campus Visits

Colleges are gearing up for visits from seniors and their parents this fall and winter. They will turn their attention to juniors late winter and on into spring. Many will host special days for this purpose. It is not too early for 9th and 10th graders and their parents to make a few visits.

Campus visits are without a doubt the best way to determine if a college is a good match for a student. Many families do not get the most from a visit, because they are unprepared when they go. Here are some tips for getting the most from a college visit.

Research the school before you arrange the visit. Be certain that the college offers the programs in which your student is interested. Do the location, distance from home, size, and academic reputation match the profile that you and your child have agreed upon? If you have yet to discuss these factors, do so before you begin visiting colleges.

At least one parent and the student should visit. The choice of a college is a family decision which is driven by personal values, economic factors and the degree of independence that the student will be required to exercise. It is very important that both student and parents are comfortable with the college selected.

Call the admissions office to schedule a visit. Don't just show up; the people you wish to talk with may not be available. Ask to speak with an admissions representative and a financial aid officer, and schedule a tour including the facilities of the programs of interest. Request to sit in on a class and to meet with coaches or activity advisors. Colleges expect to provide these experiences to visiting students. They may suggest certain dates on which they are set up to provide a wide range of experiences for both prospective students and their parents. These are excellent, especially for your first few visits.

Complete a College Visit Form and return it to the high school at least one day prior to the visit. Students who turn the above named form in before making a visit are excused from school. While at the college ask for a signed statement verifying your visit. (Admissions offices know that high schools require these, but may not give one unless asked) Students who bring verification from the college have their absence removed. They are considered in attendance, on a field trip. Juniors and seniors are permitted 3 such days per year; freshmen and sophomores may take one such day. Of course, more visits may be arranged outside of the school calendar.

Make a list of questions to ask before you go. A comprehensive list of potential questions is available in the guidance office.

Go when classes are in session at the college. You will get a much better feel for the general atmosphere of the campus and attitude of the students and faculty. You will also have an opportunity to speak with faculty and students.

After the official tour, take your own tour. Spend an hour wandering around campus on your own. Go to the student center for a snack and talk to some of the students you meet there.

If you can, spend 24 hours on campus. Stay in a dorm, eat the food, visit the library in the evening. Try to get a feel for the total experience on the campus.

Take notes. After visiting a couple schools, it can all start to run together.

Go back. Many students will visit a school their junior year, then return for a second visit their senior year. It is worth the time and effort. Other than a home or a luxury vehicle, a college education is the single biggest investment, many people will make in their lifetime. It pays to be a careful consumer.

College Visitation Form

I will be visiting _____ on _____.
Name of college Date

If a statement on college stationery signed by a college official attesting to this visit is brought to school following the visit, this excused absence will be converted to an individual field trip. (Not counted as an absence).

Person Contacted

Student's Signature

Phone Number

Parent's Signature

Counselor's Signature