

# **THE COLLEGE VISIT**

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## THE COLLEGE VISIT

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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, know the value of first hand sources and can distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources. Regrettably, many students base their selection of colleges on information gathered from the college reference books such as The Insider's Guide, The College Handbook, Princeton Review, Fiske Guide, through various internet sources or hearsay evidence. 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. This may also be true of their web sites. 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—for your college experience. Identifying these 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 that will 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 give out of date information, 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

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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, a chance to sit in on a class, informal conversations with students and faculty, eating in the dining hall and staying in a dorm overnight. 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. 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 feel the spirit of the college once 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 your part. 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

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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

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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. A 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*, the latter meaning that it could 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 June.**

## THE VIRTUAL VISIT AND OTHER ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES

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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 150 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 60 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

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- 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, we suggest that you call the Admissions Office will confirm that the information is correct
- Request to have material sent to you in advance of your visit to familiarize yourself with the college before your visit so you can prepare questions to ask. (This information may be obtainable on the college web site.)
- Bring an unofficial copy of your transcript and test scores, as well as a short resumé 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 your impressions of other colleges you are 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. If you are planning to visit other colleges in the area, be aware that most admissions offices keep a file with directions from their school to nearby campuses. 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**

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- 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 aspects of the college that you want to remember.
- Talk to **students** you see on campus and ask questions that you cannot readily find answers for elsewhere.
  - What is 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 admissions 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 the variety of student activities taking place and the issues of importance 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? Are they prepared for class? 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 know the students’ names? 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, graduate school and job placement for graduates. What companies recruit on campus? For what types of jobs?

### **WHEN YOU TALK TO STUDENTS, ASK...**

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- 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...**

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- 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...**

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- 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?

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## **COLLEGE VISIT CHECKLIST**

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*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.*

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## OBSERVATIONS BY CATEGORIES

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### 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

## COLLEGE COMPARISON WORKSHEET

	College A	College B	College C	College D	College E	College F
<b>ADMISSIONS CRITERIA</b> Application deadlines Special admissions plans - rolling admissions - early admission, early action, early decision - early notification % of applicants accepted Tests required IB/AP credit policy						
<b>PEOPLE</b> Total enrollment Undergraduate enrollment Freshman enrollment % of entering students who graduate Geographical distribution Male-Female ratio Quality and accessibility of faculty Social life; Fraternities/Sororities Diversity of student body Intellectual level of students Accessibility of administration Students primarily residential? Recreational opportunities						
<b>ACADEMIC PROGRAM</b> Availability of intended major; dual majors? Reputation for academic quality Laboratory resources Library resources in degreed field Average size of freshman classes Availability of off-campus programs Quality of facilities to support intended majors Internships						
<b>CAMPUS / LOCATION</b> Appearance of campus and dorms Quality of facilities and activities Access to cultural and social opportunities Availability of housing Distance from home Sports program Availability of good places to study Availability of nearby shopping Convenience of transportation						
<b>COST</b> Total cost, including tuition and all fees Cost of transportation between campus and home Availability of financial aid Guaranteed aid for all four years? Aid available for foreign students Availability of employment opportunities						