

The Ultimate Test Drive—Making the Most of the Campus Visit

- People who want to buy a car often spend a lot of time test-driving cars, but once they buy one and drive it off the lot, the car depreciates in value.
- The opposite is true of “test driving” a college: the time a student spends visiting a college can help him or her know if the school is a good match.
- Once the student enrolls in a college, the school never loses value. For students who may not have opportunities to visit college campuses, college fairs and visiting with college representatives who come to their high schools provide a reasonable substitute.



THE CAMPUS VISIT

- One of the most important parts of your college research is the campus visit.
- Visiting the colleges on your list will give you a firsthand impression of the students, faculty, staff, facilities, and programs.
- On a visit you can learn what the admission office is looking for in its applicants, gain a feeling for the academic and social atmosphere, see the study/living/recreation facilities, talk with students, and get a sense of the surrounding community.

THE VISIT

- Admission offices are open all year, but visiting when classes are in session is best. If you visit in the summer, you can certainly learn about admission and get a general tour of the campus, but it might be hard to get a good sense of the atmosphere of the college.
- The best time to visit?
- Spring Break of your junior year can be ideal. Even if you are not certain where you might eventually apply, if you can visit one large, one medium size, and one small school, you will be better prepared to make final decisions about where to apply.
- Once you have narrowed your list in the fall of the senior year, you may want to make return over- night visits to schools to which you will be applying. On these visits, plan to go to classes and interact with students.
- If at all possible, try to visit colleges before you apply. You may discover the school is not at all what you had thought it would be. However, attending accepted students visit programs at the colleges you have visited previously can help you narrow down your choices.

SPECIAL VISITATION DAYS

Some colleges will offer spring programs for juniors and fall programs for seniors. Check online or contact the admission office since you may need to make a reservation.

HOW TO PLAN A VISIT

- A good campus visit takes two-four hours, including time to get a sense of the surrounding town or area. Don't try to visit more than two schools in one day.
- Figure out an itinerary: where you want to travel, how you will travel, how far one school is from another.
- Call the admission office at least two weeks ahead of time to schedule your visit. Admission offices have set times for tours and information.
- Think of all the things you want to do when you visit and ask what the admission office can help you with: talking with an admission officer, taking a tour, attending a class, meeting with a professor in an area that interests you, eating a meal on campus, talking with a coach or advisor of an extracurricular activity that interests you, etc.
- Research each college before you go visit so you'll have specific questions to ask.
- Contact students you might know at the school before you plan to visit.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU VISIT

- Focus on people, place and programs in your visit.
- Talk to as many people as you can: students, dining hall workers, tour guides, faculty.
- Look at a campus newspaper and check out campus bulletin boards.
- Wander through snack bars and student centers and observe how students interact with each other.
- Keep track of all names of people you talk with, especially in the admission office.
- Go to the admission session and take the official tour.
- Listen to the tour guide, but don't jump to a conclusion about a particular school based solely on your experience with a tour guide.
- If you are meeting or interviewing with an admission staff member, be on time, be yourself, ask questions that deal with your particular needs, make sure you mention anything about your back-ground or achievements that you want the admission office to know.

AFTER THE VISIT

- Fill out the college comparison worksheet before you get to another campus.
- Send a thank you note to any admission person you meet.
- Look ahead to fall of the senior year to plan a follow-up, overnight visit.