

## **College Visit Planning**

On most campuses, the tour guides are students selected by the college for their ability to project a favorable image of the school. Some may be hesitant to contradict the admissions department and others may be very honest and open about their own experiences.

At each college visit, you will want to see the campus as it's formally presented by the admissions office and in informal ways as well. Use the following tips to help organize your visit. To make sure you have time to see everything, remember to contact the college and schedule a visit.

### ***Formal activities for a college visit***

- Take a campus tour
- Interview with an admissions officer, if offered.
- Visit the financial aid office and ask questions
- Participate in a group information session at the admissions office
- Arrange through admissions to spend the night in the dorm with a current student, if offered.

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### ***Questions to ask your tour guide***

- How large are all of your classes? Who teaches you in your courses (a professor or a teaching assistant?)
- Does this school have a core curriculum? How restrictive is it?
- How is the library? Are you able to get books when you need and want them?
- When do you have to declare a major? What are the most popular majors?
- Tell me about housing. Are some dorms much better than others? Do many students live off campus?
- What percentage of students study abroad during any given year?
- What percentage of the student population is in a fraternity or sorority? Is it an important part of campus life?
- What are weekends like? What are alternatives to the typical party scene?
- What do you like best about your experience and education here?
- What kind of academic and/or personal support services are available?

### ***Informal activities for a college visit***

- Read the student newspaper—even the ads.
- Try to find other student publications—department newsletters, 'alternative' newspapers, etc.
- Eat in the cafeteria.
- Ask students why they chose the school.
- Wander around campus by yourself.
- Search for a favorite book in the library.
- Read the bulletin boards in the student union.
- Ask students what they like and dislike about the school.
- Sit in on a class (or two!)
- Talk to a professor in your chosen major(s)
- Talk to a coach in your chosen sport
- Talk to a student or counselor in the career center
- Read the bulletin boards in the academic department to which you are applying.
- Eavesdrop on students to hear what they are talking—or complaining—about.

- Walk or drive around the community surrounding campus.
- Listen to the college's radio station.
- Try to see a dorm that you did not visit on the tour.
- See if you can imagine yourself at this college.
- Tour the athletic facilities. How modern is the equipment? Can you use the ice rink when the hockey team isn't practicing? What about the tennis courts?
- Visit the Career Center. Is it professionally staffed? How extensive are the job postings? What companies recruit on campus?
- Visit the college bookstore. Does it sell used textbooks? What kinds of books would you is required to read for your possible major?

Not all these ingredients will be possible for each visit. For example, classes are not usually held on Saturdays and some institutions frown on strangers spending the night in the dorms. Many colleges, however, will offer incentives (for example, free meal tickets and an overnight host program) to make certain that prospective applicants do visit and make the most of their opportunity. Again, ask specifically about such programs when scheduling your visit.

**Students may have up to three absences excused to visit colleges during Junior and Senior years.**

## **Campus Visit Checklist**

### ***Research the College***

- Visit the college's website
- Read the view book, catalog, and/or brochures

### ***Call Ahead (Don't Write) and Ask About***

- Appointment for interview
- Tour times and starting point
- Distance / Directions
- Special accommodations
- Dining
- Dorms
- Class/Events Schedule
- What to bring
- Information that can be mailed to you in advance

### ***Prepare an Agenda***

- What do I need to know about the college?
- List of questions
- What do I want the college to learn about me?
- Resume
- Transcript
- Portfolio

### ***During Your Visit Allow Plenty of time to***

- Take a tour
- Have an interview
- Sit in on a class that interests you
- Try the food
- Meet a professor
- Stroll around the town and campus and browse through stores

### ***After the Visit***

- Make notes to refresh your memory later on.
- Jot down lingering questions.
- Send a Thank You note to the Admissions Office via E-mail or mail.

### **How Important is an Interview?**

There are several reasons why an interview is important:

- Many schools track demonstrated interest or meaningful engagement as one way to judge the seriousness of a student's interest. When you make the time and effort to be present for an interview, you demonstrate a sincere interest in the institution. You are saying "I respect you and value your school's educational opportunities. I want to learn more about you and hope you want to learn more about me."
- The interview is an opportunity to learn firsthand about the school's academic philosophy and admission policy. It's a time for you to confirm or dispel any rumors you may have heard and to glean important facts. Understanding how the selection process works will help you make yourself a better candidate.
- The interview is an opportunity for you to present yourself in a very personal way. If you are articulate and outgoing with a depth of personal insight that makes you an attractive candidate, you should make certain to interview at every college in which you have a strong interest if interviews are available. If, however, you come across in a negative way, it may have damaging effects on your candidacy.

Different schools have different policies regarding interviews so you will have to contact each school before you visit. These are the possibilities:

- No interviews are offered. Instead, the college offers group information sessions only.
- Alumni interviews (typically off-campus).
- Interviews are optional and informational only (sometimes conducted by students who attend the college).
- Interviews are encouraged or required and become a part of the student's application folder.

If a college does offer on-campus interviews, take advantage of the experience. Consider interviewing first at a school that is not your first choice. This experience will be helpful for the next interview.

### ***Planning Your Visit/Interview***

The best way to approach visits/interviews is to sit down with a map and plan your trip. Only plan to visit one or two colleges in a day, and allow at least 3 hours for interviews, tours, and personal investigation. Once you have planned your trip, then telephone each college and ask if they give interviews. If they do, then make your appointment. Also inquire about tour times. Be sure to take a tour at each school; you will really gain a sense of the college if you make the best use of the visit.

### ***Some Helpful Hints for Interviews***

- Dress neatly and appropriately, not too formal and not too casual either.
- Have questions in mind for the interviewer. You can bring a notebook into the interview with a list of questions that you are prepared to ask.
- Look the interviewer straight in the eye.
- Answer questions directly.
- Be natural. Be yourself. Be relaxed.

## What Are They Looking For?

The admission staff wants to gather information on the "total" student: academic and educational potential, motivation, and personality traits. More specifically, the interviewer will be collecting evidence of the following:

**Intellectual Promise:** This is a favorite area of faculty interviewers who see in each prospective student a potential colleague—one who will join them in the pursuit of knowledge. Questions about favorite books or courses are often attempts to measure your level of intellectual curiosity or determine your interest in learning as an end in itself.

**Motivation:** Your interviewer will try to measure your inner drive, probably by asking you to list some of your important accomplishments. When doing so, remember to explain why each accomplishment was important.

**Values:** There is no "right" or "wrong" being tested. Your interviewer simply wants to know what values you will bring with you to the campus. This should not be misconstrued as an attempt to purge the student body of undesirable elements. Be relaxed and prepared to state your beliefs with firmness and conviction.

**Personality:** As with values, there are no rights or wrongs in this area. Your interviewer will try to measure your approach to everyday life in an attempt to determine if you are a good fit with the personalities of the current student body. Not being so does not mean a denial of admission. Being different may actually be a plus, but you never know until the admission committee's final analysis.

**Interest in the Institution:** Demonstrating a sincere interest in the school to its admission officers during the interview.

**Leadership:** Every college hopes to enroll a certain number of students who will generate activity and provide the student leadership so necessary for successful extracurricular activities. The types of positions you have held (elected or appointed) and how well you have carried out your responsibilities will be an important factor in most college interviews. If you haven't held an official position in a club or activity, think of other ways you have demonstrated leadership in your life and share those. Leadership can show itself anywhere!

**Preparation:** Your interviewer will expect some familiarity with the college and its admission process and will attempt to discover how much you learned about the institution prior to your visit. Being well prepared (taking time to learn about the institution) will demonstrate your sincerity and enable the interviewer to go into higher levels of discussion much more quickly. Poorly prepared students (those who ask whether the school has a crew team or requires SAT scores, for example) lose points in the interview process.

**Confidence:** Once again, your body language is a good sign of your attitude toward new and challenging tasks. Be careful not to be boastful, egotistical, or overconfident. At the same time, do express your positive attitude toward new and challenging opportunities.

**Independence:** How well would you cope in an unusual situation without family and close friends? Evidence of your independence can usually be brought out with questions such as "How do you spend your free time?" and "Have you ever been away from home for a relatively long period of time?"

**Articulation:** Your ability to speak well, using good diction, will make a positive impression on the interviewer. Role-playing with a friend is terrific practice, but beware of allowing your answers to become over-rehearsed. Pure spontaneity can be a big plus if you are clear in what you have to say and concise in how you say it.

**Other Traits:** Other areas that might be of interest to the institutional representative include your organizational skills, sincerity, commitment to task, and social conscience. These vary by institution and may or may not become critical to decisions made later on in the selection process.

**Sense of Humor:** Be ready to crack a smile if your interviewer is in a good mood or detects you might be too tense and tries to loosen you up a bit. Don't be afraid to laugh (that is, if the interviewer has said something amusing).

**Integrity:** This should be self-explanatory but there are many ways of being dishonest in an interview. Little white lies (for example, "my School Counselor told me not to tell anyone my SAT scores") can be just as damaging to the interviewer's overall opinion as outright falsehoods.

**Originality:** This is particularly important as so many young people seem governed by peer pressures to conform. Before your interview, take some time to think about those aspects of your character which make you unique. Bring expressions of your creativity into the conversation so they may be recognized by the institution.

**Self-Image:** Your body language is often a tip-off about how you really feel about yourself. Many admission officers say there is no more important character trait to succeeding in college than a healthy self-image. This is what brings you through the difficult days every student has during the college years

## **Sample Questions from College Admissions Interviews**

***Here are a few questions that college interviewers have told us they like to ask.***

- If you could read the evaluation your teacher has written about you, what would it say?
- Are your test scores an accurate reflection of your true abilities?
- Are you satisfied with your academic record to date?
- What has been your most satisfying contribution to your school?
- How would you describe your two or three best friends?
- Do you have any anxieties about going to college?
- What three adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
- If you could become head of your school for a month or so, what are some of the most significant changes you would make?
- What do you want to learn during your college experience?
- What priorities have you established for your college experience relative to your career goals?
- If you had to convince someone who dislikes your favorite subject that it can be worthwhile, what would you say?
- What have you done in the last six months to help another person?
- How do you like your high school? What has been the most positive experience you have had? The most negative? What would you like to change about your high school?
- What would your teachers say about you as a person?
- What is the most significant contribution you have made to your school?
- What are you looking for in a college? What interested you in this college?
- What are some of your goals—personal and career? Talk about a particular class assignment in which you found yourself most stimulated intellectually.
- What is your reason for participating in athletics (student government, community service, theater, etc.)?
- How do you expect, hope, or plan to transfer your secondary school contributions, achievements, and activities to the college level?
- What is your favorite subject in high school and why? What might you study in college?

- What books or authors have made a lasting impression on you? What book has inspired, entertained, or challenged you? What was the last book that you read for pleasure?
- What are the critical events in your life so far? Who has influenced you the most?
- How have you spent your summers?
- What are your reactions to certain current events? (Be somewhat versed on the headlines or prominent stories in the last few weeks.)
- How would you describe yourself as a person?
- How do you spend your free time?

Remember that these are sample questions. None may be asked, but the important thing is to think about how you would answer questions like these. The very process of doing that is a good exercise in preparation for the interview. Once your thinking is stimulated, you can handle most questions.

Be sure to write a thank you note after the interview. The thank you note should be brief and specific about your interview (a hand-written note OR email is appropriate).