

Summer may not be the Best Time to Make a College Visit?

Questions to ask on college visits (Pages 4 - 6)

Ten Things Colleges Seek From High School Applicants (Pages 7-9)

It seems that every mentoree, family member and friend that I have bumped into this summer, at least those connected to someone considering higher education, is making a point to take some time to visit one or more of the colleges the prospective student is interested in.

Visiting a prospective college is a very important step in the process of selecting a school. And yes, to truly get a feel for the school, it is absolutely necessary to spend some time on campus.

That said, I am afraid that summer is sometimes not the best time to make such a visit unless you are entering your senior year in high school and have made no visits as of yet.

A Convenient Time to Visit

In reality, summer is the most convenient time for families to visit a college campus. First and foremost, not only is school out for the summer, most students also having a break from extracurricular activities. Active individuals know all too well that even during school vacations during the school year co-curricular activities continue to practice making it extremely difficult to find a block of time to visit prospective schools.

In addition, parents of prospective students often are able to find larger blocks of time during the summer months to make such visits. In fact, most parents tend to plan family vacations and pleasure trips around making a stop or two at a college campus in the vicinity.

So, it is understandable that summer is likely the most convenient time for you and your family to make such a visit. Unfortunately, it is simply not always the best time to get a real feel for the campus.

Not a True Picture

While it may give you a basic feel for the campus structurally, a summer visit is devoid of the most important element: What does a day at the campus feel like when students are present and classes are in session?

Visiting during the summer will produce a definitive feeling of quiet solitude. That is because there are simply too few individuals around on summer break. That overall feeling of solitude can be very misleading and make it seem like a campus is devoid of any real social life.

There are not likely to be any athletic contests, no meetings and the outdoor quad and student union will be nearly empty. The bottom line is that students do not get a true feel of what it would be like to be a student.

Most importantly, you will have access only to trained tour guides who have been taught to sell the positive traits of the campus. It will be difficult to gain time to simply talk with other students to get the real skinny and nearly impossible to spend a night on campus or visit a class in session.

If you do make a college visit in the summer make sure it is with an Administration Officer one on one with you and your parents/guardians.

If you are seeking info on particular area or department ask to meet with a member of that department. If Sports are also in question make an appointment with a representative of the Sport you are interested.

Make a Visit and Make it at the Right Time

To get a true sense of whether or not a college is for you, you must take the time to make a campus visit. But at the same time, when you are truly narrowing down the decision, you must make a visit during the school year.

Only by visiting during the academic year can students truly discern whether or not a specific college will meet their respective academic and social expectations and needs.

Why Should You Visit Colleges?

You've read the literature, you've surfed the websites – so why do you need to visit colleges? College is a big investment of time and money so you shouldn't make a decision to attend a particular school without a thorough visit to make sure it's right for you. We'd go as far as saying that the college visit might be the most important step of your entire college search. Here are several reasons why.

See Beyond the Pretty Pictures

While looking at a year book, catalog and website are extremely helpful, they are created from someone else's perspective and don't offer a personal view of the campus. To really get a feel for the school, you need to walk around the campus, visit the residence halls and meet some students in order to see it through your own eyes.

Gather Additional Information

Campus visits are a great way to find out more about what the college offers its' students. Make sure to pick up any additional school material you see, such as brochures and financial aid forms, but don't limit yourself to that. Look around for newspapers, calendars and bulletin boards. Check postings around campus to see what events are advertised, entertainment is planned, study abroad opportunities are available, and use that to determine what the overall energy is and whether that fits with your personality.

Introduce Yourself/Sell Yourself

Through the interview and visit, you have the chance to talk to those actually in the college community: students, faculty, admission and financial aid counselors. You'll learn more about the college and can initiate a relationship with people who will help you through the admittance process if you choose to do so. On the flipside, the college has a chance to get to know you, which can be a great advantage in gaining admission to select schools.

Test Your Chemistry

After all the literature, rankings and advice from family and friends it really all comes down to one thing: is the college a good match for you? The visit will help you answer that question because you are able to immerse yourself in the environment and picture yourself there. Many students say they felt the chemistry the minute they walked onto the right campus so think about that during your visit. So after each visit, ask yourself the big question: did you feel at home there?

Some Words of Wisdom from some experts:

“ **It is not essential to visit every campus before you apply, if you can't afford it.** While some schools value the demonstrated interest that a visit indicates, they understand that not everyone is able to visit. You can find out about colleges (and also show your interest) by attending local information presentations, getting on the college's mailing list, and taking every opportunity to meet or speak with the admissions representative for your area. You can learn much from the school's own website and college information websites.

However, there is no substitute for visiting a college when it comes to deciding where to send that deposit check. If you can, attend an on-campus event for admitted students. No matter how great the college's campus or its programs, if you don't feel comfortable on campus or with your classmates, your college experience might not be as positive as you would like it to be.

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Julie Manhan
Educational Consultant
[College Navigation](#)
Seattle, WA

“ **The most important reason to visit a college is to meet the people.** Have conversations with admissions staff, professors, and students. Ask professors about their courses and the types of connections you can make through their programs. Take a couple minutes to talk to freshmen and seniors alike to see what they do and don't like about their choices. Be sure to stop by the career center, sit in on a class, and grab a meal in the dining hall. Roam around on your own after the formal tour and see the places that weren't featured. And, of course, try to spend some time checking out the local community since it could be your home for the next four years.

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Scott Daigle
[Premier College Advisors](#)
Boca Raton, FL

“ **To get the full experience and taste of the campus, a visit is very helpful.** You get to see the town, visit recreational facilities, talk to students, sit in on classes, attend student performances and sporting events, and even meet with faculty members. The best time to visit is in the spring of your junior year or the summer immediately following. This allows you to narrow your choices before filling out applications.

If you cannot afford to visit schools, you can learn a great deal about a college from its website. You can also ask the college to send information about specific programs you are interested in. Finding out all you can — with or without a visit — is what is most important.

”
Douglas Christiansen
Vice Provost for Enrollment
[Vanderbilt University](#)
Nashville, TN

“ **Many colleges have pretty campuses and good academic departments, but it's the** ”

people – students, staff, and faculty – that are at the heart of any college experience. The best way to get a sense of the people is to visit when the college is in session. Although spring break may be a convenient time to visit as a junior, it may not be ideal because many colleges are focusing on their newly admitted seniors. If you can't afford to visit, ask the college to connect you with students and alumni with whom you could meet or talk with by phone.

Visiting different kinds of colleges close to home can help to clarify the college attributes that are important to you. This can greatly inform the rest of your college search process.

Steven Syverson
Vice President for Enrollment
[Lawrence University](#)
Appleton, WI

Source: College Data

Questions to Ask on College Visits

Think of the visit as your chance to interview potential colleges. To do so, you need to be prepared with a list of questions. Take a look at this list and choose questions that are most important to you. Bring them with you in your Visit Notebook and make notes as you get your answers. When you get home, use this to help evaluate the colleges you visited.

Academics

- Which academic programs on campus are the most popular?
- How hard is it to get into the courses in these programs?
- What are the largest and average class sizes for freshmen?
- What is your student/teacher ratio?
- Who teaches most classes – graduate students or professors?
- Do you have an Honors College?
- What courses do typical freshmen take?
- What type of research are students doing in my area of interest?
- What are the graduation requirements for the major I'm interested in?
- What percent of students move on to graduate school?
- Are tutoring services available?
- **DO YOU HAVE INTERNSHIPS IN MY FIELD OF STUDY? (Must Ask)**
- **Does your school recalculate GPA and how is it done? Will it affect the money I receive?**
- Ask them if they recalculate GPA, and if so, how.
- Ask them, under the recalculated scale, what kinds of GPAs generally get admitted to the college. Even when guidebooks report average GPAs, there's no way for you to know if the school is reporting recalculated GPAs -- unless you ask.
- Also ask an admission officer if they use class rank in the admissions process or not.

Admissions

- When is the deadline for applying?
- What are your requirements for Freshman?
- Does the University have a minimum ACT/SAT Score for admission?
- Does the University have a minimum GPA for admission?
- How long does it take to find out an admissions decision?
- Will my choice of major affect my chances of admission?
- What if I enroll as an undeclared major?
- What academic elements are considered in the admission process and how important is each of these factors?
- What percent of freshman return their sophomore year?
- What type of students does best here?
- What makes this college a good choice for me?
- Do you take my final (Grad date) ACT/SAT Score? Or, do you take score from the Fall (i.e., Nov) of my senior year?
- How do I arrange a college visit?
- Do you have Early Admissions?

Social Life

- Are there a wide variety of activities to choose from?
- Is the campus safe?
- How do I get tickets for athletic events?
- Are part-time jobs available on campus?
- What are the most popular extracurricular activities?
- Does the campus have fraternities and sororities? If so, what percent of the student body participates in Greek life?
- Where is the central hangout for students?
- Are sports the primary social event? If not, what is?
- What is there to do on weekends? Do most students stick around or do they leave campus?

Environment

- Can you walk to and from classes? Are the residence halls close by?
- What type of school is it: serious, a party school, strongly religious...?
- What is the ethnic breakdown of the student body?
- What portion of the student body lives on campus versus commutes?
- What is the parking situation and can freshmen have cars on campus?
- What is the surrounding area like?
- What is there to do off-campus?

Residential Living

- Is campus housing guaranteed for all four years? Do many students live on campus all four years?
- What housing options are available after freshman year?
- Are freshmen required to purchase a specific type of meal plan?
- What are the dining options on campus? How late are they open?
- Are there restaurants nearby?
- Are the dorms wired for internet/e-mail services?
- What laundry facilities are available?
- Where can I get necessities if I don't have a car?

Costs

- What is the all-in total yearly cost of attendance, including books, tuition, fees, housing and meal plans?
- Does the ability to pay the full cost of attendance have any impact on the college's decision to admit you?
- Which financial aid forms are required?
- What was the average freshman aid package last year?
- What percentage of that is in student loans?
- What types of payment plans exist?
- What percent of students graduate in four versus five years?
- Do I qualify for school scholarships?

Support

- What tutoring, counseling and other support services are available?
- Are there any special support services for special needs students? Is there any additional cost charged for these services?
- Do I need to bring my own computer? What computer access will I have?
- What security is available and are there any safety issues on campus? If so, how are they addressed?
- What transportation options are available for students without cars?
- Where do students go if they have a medical emergency?

Visit Prep Work: What to Know Before You Go

It may sound fun to head out on a road trip to visit campuses but it can be a huge waste of time if you don't plan ahead. Take the time to do your prep work before you hit the road and your visits will be much more successful.

Conduct your initial research close to home

You should already have determined what your requirements are and tested them out by visiting campuses close to home. Even if they're not on your list, nearby colleges are good ways to verify what is most important to you and to practice the art of campus visiting!

Once you have your list, do your homework

Campus visits are a way for both sides to get to know each other. You don't want to make a bad impression if you determine you're interested in the school, so do your homework. It's important to know something about the college before you arrive on its campus, especially if you have an interview scheduled. Read the material they send you, surf the website and prepare a list of questions to ask your tour guide, admission counselor or financial aid officer.

Map your course and schedule your trip

Ideally you want to visit a couple of campuses back-to-back, giving yourself at least half a day at each location. It's best if you can go when their classes are in session so you can get a true feel for the campus and possibly sit in on a class. To help you schedule your trip:

- Find out when/how often college tours run, and if you have to sign up in advance.
- If an interview is suggested, make an appointment. Also, consider meeting with the financial aid officer or coach.
- If you're curious about a club, program, or a sport, arrange to attend a practice, rehearsal, or meeting.
- Be sure to get a map of the school. You don't want to spend half of your visit trying to park or find the admission office.
- Request visitor's information in case you want to spend the night or tour the area.

Pack supplies: campus visit checklist, notebook and camera

After a couple of visits, colleges will start to blend together so it's important to bring tools to help you remember what you saw and heard. Bring your checklist to make sure you cover all your bases and take photos and notes along the way. Write down your impressions before you visit the next campus or by the end of the day it will all be one big blur!

10 Things Colleges Seek From High School Applicants

by Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D.

College-bound? This article provides an overview of the kinds of things admissions offices seek from applicants -- and is especially useful for high school sophomores and juniors as you begin your college planning, but it can also be useful for seniors as you prepare your college applications.

So, what are the 10 things college admissions offices seek from high school students when you apply to college? Admissions officials mention these items as important to their decisions when evaluating applicants.

1. Strong Scores on Standardized Tests. Of those colleges and universities that require the SAT or ACT as part of your application -- and a small (but growing) number of schools do not -- admissions counselors seek scores that match or exceed the scores of their current students. For better or worse, standardized college entrance exam scores are seen as the most objective measure of your college potential. In the process of conducting your research on colleges, you

should easily be able to find a profile of the most recently admitted class. (Note: colleges that do not require a standardized test for admission consideration do usually require supplemental materials, such as a graded paper from a core academic course and a portfolio that showcases your strengths, interests, and achievements.)

2. High Grade Point Average. It goes without question that grades are an extremely important element of your college application. Colleges will ask you to submit official transcripts from your high school and possibly recalculate your grade point average based on some internal system they use for weighting different types of courses. Your goal, from the first year of high school forward, is to achieve the best grades you can. If you had a rough freshman year, but have since rebounded with much stronger grades, fear not, because colleges certainly look for trends in academic achievement -- and a record of constant improvement when your GPA is not as strong as you would like is a good sign to most admissions counselors about your growth and potential.

3. Challenging College-Prep Courses. Your challenge is not just to get the best grades you can -- but to get the best grades you can in the most academically challenging courses as you can. You certainly do not need to enroll in an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at your high school, but where you have the strengths, skills, and aptitude, you should at least strive for Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Most colleges will place greater weight on these "tougher" courses -- and even go so far as to rate a B in an advanced class (IB, Honors, AP) on a higher scale than an A in a comparable mainstream class.

4. Top Percentage of Class Standing. Class rank and class standing are moving a little further to the back of the pack, partly because class rank means almost nothing in high schools that are at the extremes -- horrible or exceptional. In some of the top high school programs, class rank has been found to actually hurt some of the very best students -- because only so many can be in the top 1, 5, or even 10 percent of the class. Grades obviously drive class rank, so you should of course strive for the very best grades -- and then just hope that the ranking works in your favor or that the colleges you apply to don't use rank as a top criteria for admissions.

5. Leadership Positions in a Few Organizations. Most colleges and universities are seeking leaders from within their applicant pool, and you can make your application stand out by having one or two leadership positions over the course of your high school career. Being a leader in one or two organizations means much, much more than simply being a member in 10 clubs and organizations. Not only does leadership show a certain level of maturity and character, but colleges also have an eye to all their student organizations and their need to recruit future leaders. You don't need to be the president of an organization, but you should be an officer of at least one group by the time you're a senior.

6. Active Involvement in Community Service. There's no requirement for community service to gain admittance to college, but just about all college-bound high school students have jumped on the bandwagon, volunteering throughout the local community. It seems to be one of these unwritten rules that applicants who volunteer many, many hours in the service of supporting others will become a key campus activist. Regardless of the importance for admission to college, most experts agree on the value and self-fulfillment people get in helping others.

7. Insightful and Well-Written Essay(s). Of all the 10 items on this list, the essay either gets the most attention or the least respect -- depending on who you ask. Like some of the other 10 elements on this list, not all colleges require an essay as part of the admissions application. The essay -- or essays -- are a tool used by some universities to learn more about you and why you want to attend their school. Definitely take the time to carefully consider the questions and write, edit, rewrite, and proofread your essays -- with an eye to what the essays reveal about you and your personality. Some admissions counselors admit that an amazing essay can push a marginal applicant into the accepted student group.

8. Quality Recommendations from Teachers and Guidance Counselor. The recommendation letters that you ask your teachers and your guidance counselor to write can play a key role in your college application. Ideally, you have a few favorite teachers -- teachers who not only know the quality of your work and academic acumen, but also can talk about some of your personal

qualities. It's best to ask your teachers for letters as early as you can so that they have the time to write a quality letter; obviously the most popular teachers will need even more time if they have requests from many of their students.

9. Relevant Recommendations from Professionals and Others. One other nice touch -- especially for a college you really want to attend -- is to ask a professional such as a former (or current) boss to write a letter of recommendation for you. Even better if that person has some sort of tie to the college as a donor or alumnus. Other possibilities include your supervisor from one or more of your volunteering/community service projects or a coach from one of the teams you have played for. If you have run your own business, you might ask a favorite customer to write a letter. Finally, you can also ask a family friend or religious leader to write a letter -- but personal references are not as strong as academic or professional ones.

10. Work and Entrepreneurial Experiences. While you certainly do not need to have ever held a part-time or summer job or started your own business, if you have some unique experiences, writing about your experiences can be a great essay topic as well as showcasing your professionalism and time-management skills. College admissions folks love self-starters -- applicants with a strong entrepreneurial spirit -- so proudly tell the story of your babysitting, lawn mowing, car detailing, tutoring, painting, or pet-sitting business (or whatever YOUR business is).

If you still need additional assistance please let me know!

Mr. Campbell