

SHOREWOOD COLLEGE & CAREER CENTER

Primer for Visiting Colleges



When to Visit

- Visit anytime in high school. Casual visits for younger students can kick off the thought process.
- Students in grades 9-11 can learn what kind of campus appeals to them. Sometimes preliminary preferences do not pan out!
- Students in grades 11-12 can figure out if schools are a good enough fit to keep on the list.
- *Tip:* Many schools take “demonstrated interest” into account, so visit prior to applying if possible.

2-6 Weeks Before you Visit

Figure out your itinerary. Do one or two colleges/ day for full visits.

Arrange visits via the Admissions web pages of each school.

Make any special requests (see below under “Optional”)

Do your research. Know the basics about each school: affiliations, majors, size, general living situations, financial suitability.

Prepare for any interviews or one-on-one meetings. Look up professors/ coaches, read about programs. Ask more in-depth questions about what you learned online. Questions should show that you have done some research.

Confirm dates and appointments about a week before the visits.

Look at unofficial reviews and conversations regarding the schools online. See if you can discover the school’s reputation and then during your visit, find out if it is accurate or not.

Standard Visit Elements: arrange in advance

- Student-led tour. *Tip:* take advantage of the lag time between stops; be in front and ask questions.
- Information session, usually led by an admissions counselor.

Optional Visit Elements: arrange in advance

Not available at all schools, or may be available only to juniors. However, it doesn’t hurt to ask!

- Class visit
- Admissions interview
- Meeting with a professor in a particular department, or a coach of a particular sport
- Specialized tour: of residence halls, of particular colleges within a university, of a particular program
- Overnight visit (often accepted students only)

Things to Do on Your Own

- Spend time in the student center. Where do students hang out? What is the bookstore like?
- Read a student newspaper—hard copy or online—and look for what students care about or want to change.
- Look at bulletin boards in the student center and in the academic buildings. What kinds of events are going on?
- Visit the library. Poke around for where students study and how the environment feels.
- Visit the financial aid office. Ask about need and merit aid, timelines, % of students receiving aid, average indebtedness.
- Visit the career services office. What can they tell you about outcomes? Are there job fairs on campus?
- Have a meal in the main cafeteria. (Visiting students may get a free meal.) Ask a group of students if you can join them.
- Talk to students and anyone else willing to talk. This is not the time to be shy!
- Visiting students should take time to wander and have conversations without parents/ siblings.
- Explore the area surrounding the campus. What is within walking distance? Are there (restaurants/ coffee shops/ bookstores/ theaters/ barbershops/ whatever) close by?

Making Judgments

Be sure you react to elements larger than one individual (i.e., the tour guide shouldn’t make or break a visit).

Get beyond the physical appearance of a place. How do the individuals react to you? To each other? What is the student culture? How are the relationships between students and professors?

Consider creating a rating system for your visit: one to five stars? Ratings in categories (dorms, academics, people)? Your ratings immediately following a visit may or may not be the same you make a week or a few months later.

Trust gut reactions, but also try to keep an open mind.

Spontaneous Visits: Seize any Opportunity!

If you are on a road trip and need to stop someplace to eat, try to make it to a college town. Everything you notice will tell you what you want or don't want in a school or college town.

Start at the admissions office if it's open. Run through all the standard and optional visit elements to see what you can get in. If school is not in session, remember that having student energy around will make the place feel much different than an empty campus.

Take notes of things you'd like to ask and email the admissions office when you get home.

Interview Advice

Interviews are often limited to spring-semester juniors or for seniors. Prepare for possible questions:

- Why are you interested in this school?
- Tell me about some of your own academic interests.
- What can I tell you about our college?
- Why do you want to major in _____ ?
- What do you see yourself doing in 10 years?
- Does your high school record accurately reflect your effort and ability?
- What will you contribute to our community?
- Recommend a good book to me.

Presenting Yourself

Dressing casually—jeans, not sweats—is fine for most visits. However, consider how you are presenting yourself. Do not wear a college sweatshirt from another school.

There may be an expectation to dress up somewhat for interviews. Call the admissions office to ask for guidance.

Students should answer questions directly; don't look at your mom for her to answer. Speak clearly.

Basically, don't offer college reps a reason to doubt that you would be a great asset to their school.

Questions to ask Students: don't be shy; ask any students!

- Why did you choose this school?
- What is your favorite/ least favorite thing here?
- Do you know people who have left without graduating? Why did they leave?
- What is your favorite/ least favorite class?
- How do you like your professors? How well do you know your professors? Tell me about your favorite professor.
- What do you wish they had here?
- What do you do on weekends?
- How do you like your dorm/ roommate?
- How much time do you spend on academics? Extracurricular activities? Social life?
- What do students rave about? Complain about?
- What do you wish you had known before you came here?

After Your Visit

Have conversations with your family, but realize that you may need time to formulate your impressions.

When you get home, write thank yous—either on paper or via email—to any professor, admissions counselor, or coach who met with you one-on-one.

Try to identify what prompted positive or negative gut reactions. If it was the small community, look at other small schools.

If it was the research topics, then search for schools with great undergraduate research opportunities.

Keep track of what you liked where. Things can start to blur together!

Recommended Visit Resources

“5 Tips for a Great Campus Visit” Tulane Admissions Blog 1.18.18

“College Visits” in [College Admission: From Application to Acceptance](#) by Robin Mamlet and Christine Vandevelde.

[Big Future Campus Visit Guide](#), the College Board.

