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## The Four Must Dos on Campus Visits

By Elizabeth LaScala



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living and/or learning opportunity, such as an honors program or scholarship.

### 2. Take the campus tour, then tour some more.

When you take a campus tour, you are most likely to see a dorm room, the library, athletic facilities, the recreation center, the dining hall, the student union/center, classrooms, labs and performing arts facilities. You might receive invitations to attend events on campus or a discount to shop at the campus store. But there's a lot more to a college campus than you will see on the formal tour. It pays dividends to walk around, and find out where students go to socialize, take breaks from classes and eat meals off campus. You will want to try a meal in the dining hall, and if you have special dietary needs, find out if the school can meet them. You should also find out where students go to receive medical care. At some colleges the answer is easy; the school has a health center, maybe even a hospital on campus. At other schools, you might need to go off campus for medical care. Also, notice how students get around campus. It's easy to walk around a school that occupies only a few city blocks. But you will need to take shuttles to get around campuses at many larger, more spread-out universities.

Among the most exciting parts of the college search, and certainly one of the most important, is the campus visit. There is no better way to find out if a college is the best fit for you than to register for an information session and arrange a campus tour. Today's busy families make sacrifices in time and money to tour campuses, so make yours count by planning to do four things that help ensure a successful visit.

### 1. Work closely with the admissions office.

The student should register for the visit using his or her dedicated college email account (one used only for college admission purposes so nothing gets lost or missed). Registering allows the admissions office to record your interest in their school and to properly schedule your visit. If you have questions in advance, contact the admissions officer assigned to work with students who live in your home county or state. Send questions in advance. Ask if she or he can make arrangements, for example, to meet with students who share your interests, speak with faculty in your intended major(s) or to meet with a counselor in the career development center. Most admissions officers will take the time to answer all of your questions and help you to make these appointments. They also keep detailed records of each visiting student's interests. These records might make a difference in an admissions decision or result in an invitation to become part of a unique

### 3. Get the scoop from the college's students.

You will get first impressions on the campus tour. But you get only a small number, at best, of student impressions and then only from students who are among the happiest on campus. If your tour guide offers you a business card, take it. That person could be very helpful as you make your short list of schools as well as your final decision. But as you venture on your own, stop and talk to students. Ask them if they like the school. Was it easy or hard for them to get into the major that they wanted? To transfer to a different major? To see a professor for help on a paper or exam? What is the social center of the campus? Where do students live after the first year? Take and read a copy of the campus newspaper, so you get a sense of hot topics on the campus, cultural events, athletic spirit and guest speakers - and add it to the other information you gather.

### 4. Check out the community off campus.

The campus is not the complete picture of a college community. There are many differences between a school that's in a large city versus one in a smaller "college town." The college town is more likely to look to the college to be the cultural center of the community; a large city will have a cultural life that is not over-dependent on the college for support. You're more likely to find more "school spirit" in the college town. But you're also likely to find more cultural and entertainment options in the larger city. In either case, be sure that you see how easy or hard it is to get into the community surrounding campus. Can you walk right into town? Or do you need to rely on public transportation or a car to get around?

College admissions offices try to make the campus visit experience as pleasant as possible. But it's up to you to make it a truly informative experience - one you gather all of the information that you need to understand if the school should have a place on your final college application list. The time to visit is well worth the investment, given the investment that you will make after choosing a college.

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