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College Visits 101

THE BASICS

When you visit a college campus, the point is to get a "feel" for what it's like to be there. Every campus has its own personality, just as every person has a unique personality. The challenge is to find a fit where the two personalities can get along! The brochures and websites will give you an idea, but they always show pretty, smiling, diverse groups of people on bright and sunny days. They don't show you the "bad" weather and the "ugly" parts of the campus – and every campus has those! Keep in mind that it is important when you visit to seek answers from a variety of students and campus officials in order to get a well-rounded view of the college. Take advantage of as much of the visit as you can! Here are a few tips:

- Some questions are duplicated – ask the same question to different people and see if the answers are consistent.
- Take notes! That way you can compare schools later and not have to remember or confuse things.
- This is a long list, but certainly not all-inclusive! Come up with your own questions.
- Highlight the ones on this list you like and want to ask. Be prepared!

Here are some things to think about and sample questions to ask:

QUESTIONS FOR TOUR GUIDES

Make these questions more focused on student life and personal experiences. If you need clarity on academic requirements, inquire about those things, but also ask the questions that aren't outlined in the admissions materials – those that only a student can answer! For example, some of the important questions to ask a student are these top 5:

- Why did you choose this college?
- What other schools did you consider?
- What do you like most about this school?
- What do you wish you could change?
- Is there anything you know now that you wish you had known as a prospective student?

Academics

- How often do students get the chance to interact with professors outside of class time? Do the professors hold office hours? How do they communicate with students?
- How effective is your advisor? How is academic advising organized here?
- How often do students collaborate with professors on research or other academic projects?
- Who teaches the classes and lab sessions, especially the introductory courses? Professors or graduate assistants?
- How big are the introductory level classes?
- Are there study support groups or tutoring programs available? Do they cost extra?
- Is there an honors college here or a special honors program?

- What are some special programs available to students, like studying abroad, pre-professional programs, etc.? Are they open to anyone?
- How much reading and writing is expected?
- How many hours do you spend in class each week? How many hours do you spend each week studying?
- How do students register for classes? Is it difficult to enroll in courses you need?
- What is your favorite class that you've taken so far? What made it so great?
- What are some of the most popular classes on campus?
- Where do you study? Do students use the library or are there other quiet spaces on campus?
- What are the library hours? Are the librarians accessible to help with research, etc.?
- Are there computer labs on campus? Is it hard to get on a computer? Is the campus more Mac or PC friendly? What are the policies on printing?
- Do most students have their own computers? Are you required to? Are there any models that are suggested or required? Are there any discounts or group rates available?
- Is wireless accessible in dorms and academic buildings?

Residential Life

- Is on campus housing required for first-year students? All students? Do most students live on campus? Is it guaranteed?
- Do all first-year students live together, or are they combined with upper-class students?
- What are the housing options? (dorms, apartments, suites, co-ed, single sex, themed housing, cooperative housing, etc.)
- How are roommate assignments made? Can a student request a specific roommate?
- What is the university's alcohol policy? Are there "substance free housing options?
- What are dorms like? Are there community restrooms? Lounges? Kitchens? What about room amenities like carpet and air conditioning?
- Are students allowed to live off-campus? Is it difficult to find a place to live?
- What is the meal plan like? (21 meal/week? 20 meals/week? 14 meals/week?)
- How is the food? Is it the same in every dining hall or are there other options?
- Are students allowed to have cars? What about first year students? How is parking handled?

Extra-Curricular Activities and Student Life

- Are there any special student traditions (academic, athletic, social, etc.)?
- What do you do on a typical weeknight on campus? How about a weekend night?
- Do students stay on campus for the weekend?
- What kinds of student groups are you involved in?
- What are some of the most popular organizations on campus? How easy is it to get involved?
- Are there any groups associated with academic departments, like drama troupes or science clubs? Can first-year students get involved?
- What are the opportunities for performance and study of music and drama? Are there productions open to first year students or non-majors?
- What musical opportunities are there for non-music majors? Are there any costs associated with these opportunities (lesson fees, instrument rental, etc.)? Are there student band and ensembles?
- Are there opportunities for students in the campus media? Who runs the newspaper / TV station / radio station?

- What kinds of programmed events take place on campus? Who does the programming (the students or the university)?
- How are student activities funded? Is there a student activity fee? What is covered by the student activity fee (athletic events, concerts, etc.)?
- Do students work while they are in school? Are there on-campus jobs available?
- What are some of your colleges big events (Homecoming, Family Week, Alumni Week, Dance Marathon, etc.)?
- Is there Greek life on campus? What percentage of students are involved in a fraternity or sorority?
- How active and noticeable is Greek life on campus? Do they throw parties, host events, do community service?
- Do the fraternities and sororities have houses? If not, do they have meeting and social facilities available?
- Are there places to visit off campus? Is it easy to leave campus, even without a car?
- How many students participate in varsity athletics? Is the school NCAA Division I, II, III or NAIA?
- What kinds of sports are offered as intramural or club sports? How many students get involved in intramurals? Are there any exercise programs offered? Is that an extra cost?
- What type of gym facilities are available and what type of access do non-athletes have to these facilities?
- How does the athletics department view the relationship between athletics and academics?
- Where are the most popular student "hangouts"? (Visit one of these places to see what it's like!)

QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSORS

Ask professors about academic life, requirements, and advising. Also include questions about things like academic expectations, specific departmental requirements, or more in depth questions about a particular academic program.

- What do you expect of your students?
- What are the typical course requirements? How many exams, research papers, presentations?
- Do you offer students opportunities to participate in research? Do you mentor students?
- Who teaches the introductory courses – graduate students or professors?
- How do you make yourself accessible to your students?
- It tutoring is needed, what arrangements are made for the student?
- How many students do you advise at one time?
- What is the average student/teacher ratio?
- What is the average class size?
- How easy is it for a student to switch majors?
- Do students often collaborate on class projects in our outside of class?
- What role does technology play in the classrooms?

QUESTIONS FOR ADMISSIONS COUNSELORS:

*Before asking any of these questions, ask the Admissions Counselor about your chances of admission. Take an unofficial copy of your transcript and academic record with you, look the Admissions Counselor in the eye, and ask for an honest read on your chances.

- What is the school known for? What types of students typically attend?
- How diverse is the school and what do student go on to do after graduation?
- Why do students select this college?
- What is the process for evaluating a student's application? How important are SAT/ACT scores in the final decision?
- Do you recalculate the student's GPA?
- If I apply for financial aid, does that reduce my chances of being admitted?
- What are the graduation requirements? Are there any general requirements that one often takes as a first year student? Do you offer first year seminars?
- Are there opportunities to study abroad or college exchange programs?
- How easy is it to obtain a part-time job on campus?
- What is the percentage of students who graduate in 4 years? 5 years?
- After graduation, what is the career placement rate and/or graduate school acceptance percentage (ask about specific fields of graduate programs important to you)?
- What kinds of things are your most recent alumni doing?
- How does your college accept and apply AP, ACP, or Ivy Tech credits?
- What resources are available for students with an IEP or who need extra help?
- What internship possibilities are there for me? Are there opportunities to complete internships for credit? How does a student find an internship?
- Does the college have a career center? How many students does it serve each year?
- What resources are available for students seeking jobs?
    - Resume assistance?
    - Cover letter workshops?
    - Mock interviews?
    - Job fairs?
    - Research library for careers?
    - Alumni Network?

QUESTIONS FOR FINANACIAL AID OFFICERS

- Do you off automatic Academic Scholarships? If so, what are the scholarships award levels and what are the criteria for each level? Is there a separate application process? Do you offer other need-based scholarships? How do you apply for them?
- For need-based Financial Aid, do you require any additional financial information beyond the FAFSA? If so, do you use the College Scholarship Service Profile (CSS Profile)? Do you have your own institutional form?
- What, if any, changes do you make to the Federal Methodology for need-based financial aid? Do you look at home equity? Retirement accounts? Cash values built up in life insurance policies? What else? (Focus on how much those things that apply to you will affect your need-based Financial Aid?
- Do you meet 100% of demonstrated financial need? If you know your current Expected Family Contribution (EFC) under the federal formula, give it to the Financial Aid officer to get specific. Also share a copy of your high school transcript so your academic credentials are known.
- If you don't meet 100% of the demonstrated financial need, what is the average unmet need?
- What is the average academic scholarship amount?
- What is the average need-based grant?
- What is the average amount of student loan in a first-year student financial aid award?
- Do you count Parent Plus Loans for Undergraduate Study loan money in meeting need?