**COLLEGE OPEN HOUSES AND CAMPUS VISITS**

All colleges encourage prospective students to visit during their junior and senior year of high school. These visits help in the decision-making process of which school to attend. Check with the schools you are considering and see when their campus visits are. Plan to visit if at all possible. See a dorm, talk with students, meet with the admissions representatives and learn what scholarships might be available for you. On-campus open houses are a great way to get a feel of how well a certain school suits you. At an Open House, the day will be organized to allow you to tour the campus and speak with a variety of students and faculty from different departments. A live visit does much more than any web site, virtual tour, brochure, or pamphlet can ever do. Some things to keep in mind are as follows:

• Contact the admissions office beforehand by phone, e-mail, or online to reserve your space at the open house.

• Make a list of questions you do not want to forget to ask.

• Always try to talk to current students on campus. Take the opportunity to ask them any questions you have.

• Look for over-night open house opportunities.

• Ask ahead of time for an opportunity to sit in in a class

**Ten things you should do on a College Visit**

1. Talk to students

This may be the most important part of your campus visits and an opportunity that too many college-bound students do not take advantage of. If you visit colleges while school is in session, you should make a point to approach a few students—in the cafeteria, at the library, or just while walking around campus—and ask them any questions you have or even just about their general experience at the school. You’ll get much more honest answers than you will from tour guides, and most students will be more than happy to stop and chat for a few minutes.

2. Browse the bookstore

If you are the first child in your family to attend college, you should prepare to dissociate yourself from your parents upon entering the bookstore. As soon as mom or dad spies a price tag on a textbook, they may react with surprise, anger, disbelief, tears, or any combination of the above. After they’ve calmed down, reassure them that you already set up accounts on [**Amazon**](http://www.amazon.com/), [**Textbooks.com**](http://www.textbooks.com/), and [**Half.com**](http://www.half.com/), and convince them that your prudence and frugality should earn you one of those nice college hoodies from the bookstore. Just don’t show them the receipt.

3. Visit the office of your academic department chair

If you have any inkling whatsoever about what your major in college might be, you should try to make an appointment to meet briefly with the department chair during your campus visit. The chairperson will be thrilled to meet a potential major, and you’ll get some valuable insight into the courses you’d take, professors you’d study under, and academic opportunities that your school and potential major will offer. Don’t hesitate to schedule several of these visits, especially if you’re unsure about your potential major.

4. Size up the gym and on-campus athletic facilities

Most colleges offer some sort of athletic facilities. In fact, sometimes those facilities are just as good as, if not better than, professional gyms! So if you’re interested in getting into or staying in shape, make sure your college has a state-of-the-art gym. And if you’re into [**college athletics**](http://www.collegexpress.com/articles-and-advice/athletics/), the school’s on-campus fields and other facilities are also something you should visit. Also remember that games on campus can be a pretty big draw, and even if you’re not a huge sports fan, they double as a popular social event.

5. Locate the health center

If you’re lucky, you won’t spend much time in the campus health center. However, should you get sick or injured and are in need of anything from emergency care to DayQuil, it’s always reassuring to know you have access to medical care and technology.

6. Stop by the admission office...for an interview!

While you’re on your campus visit, why not put a face to your application? Make an appointment to meet with an admission counselor so that they can get to know you as more than a list of test scores and activities. This is your chance to show your personality, and you can even use the time to ask any [**questions you might still have about the school**](http://www.collegexpress.com/articles-and-advice/admission/blog/top-questions-ask-about-prospective-colleges/). Just be sure that you’re friendly, polite, and articulate, because a first impression is a lasting one, so make sure what you are wearing is appropriate.

7. Survey the classrooms

If you think you can ace college exams without ever going to class, think again. Not only do you need to go to class once in a while to make sure you’re up to speed with what’s going on with tests and homework, but a lot of smaller classes also base some of their grades on participation. Granted, you can miss class once in a while, but don’t forget that attendance is often mandatory. Make sure you like the classroom settings of the colleges you’re visiting. Are the classes big or small? Are classrooms flat or stadium-style? Is the technology adequate, or better yet, very advanced? Will you be a nameless face or someone your teacher will be able to interact with?

8. Eat at the dining hall

You generally won’t have the time or space to prepare yourself a nice lunch or dinner, so the dining hall will be the simplest and most efficient way to eat on campus. The average college student eats at the cafeteria twice a day; it’s possible you'll go less often, but it’s likely you'll go even more than that, whether for a snack or late-night meal. Check for cleanliness, the variety of quality foods, and accessibility (and, you know, taste!). If the campus is big, it may have multiple dining halls, so make sure you see them all. If you have food allergies, you may want to talk to the cafeteria manager to see what your food options are.

9. Drop by the dorms

When you’re not in the classroom or grabbing a bite in the cafeteria, there is a pretty good chance you’ll be in your dorm room. While you’re visiting colleges, ask to see the freshman dorms and upperclassman dorms as well. Freshman dorms will almost always be the least impressive digs on campus, but those double and triple shared rooms are part of the freshman experience! That said, you want to make sure you’ll be moving on up as you progress in class years. Upperclassmen often have access to suite or apartment-style housing. You may also want to ask about off-campus living. Many students will opt for an apartment with friends their Junior or Senior year.

10. Hang out on the quad

You can’t make friends holed up in your dorm room. That’s why colleges and universities offer quads and other comparable hangout spots. This could be as simple as a nice lawn to read on or an open area to play football or Frisbee. And rest assured, even urban schools have common campus hangouts! If such an area doesn’t exist—or if it does and there’s nobody there—this might be a college you want to rethink. You’ll be surprised how important little things like playing catch with your buddies in between classes will factor into your enjoyment of school.