Tips for an Effective College Visit

**What are the goals of a college visit?** To gather both objective and subjective data about an institution and reflect on how that fits into what you are looking for in a college experience.

- Examples of **objective** data: Do they have the program I am looking for? Are there a lot of core courses required? Are the class sizes large or small? Can you switch easily between programs? Does it offer the extracurricular programs I want?
- Examples of **subjective** data: What are the students like? Do the students I see seem happy? Are there things I would enjoy doing on the evenings and weekends? What is the level of intellectual rigor/intensity?

**DO....**

REGISTER with the admissions office/ sign up for official tours, info sessions and interviews ahead of time if they allow it (see each school’s website as this policy is different at each school).

PREPARE – Read as much as you can about the school in advance – this will make your visit more useful. (For example, instead of trying to understand whether they offer an engineering degree, you can spend your time asking questions about whether engineering students get to try different areas before committing to one type of engineering).

MAXIMIZE your time on campus – if you want to meet a coach, try to arrange this ahead of time. If they allow class visits, sign up and schedule this ahead of time.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER – consider splitting up and joining two different tours if you visit with other people – this will allow you to compare notes.

EXPLORE – Dig around and get off the beaten path and script of the tour guide. If visiting with your parents, let them pay attention to this objective part while you stop and look in classroom windows, read postings on doors, pick up the newspaper and people watch (subjective part).

REFLECT on your thoughts before you discuss your impressions with others. What are the particular aspects of the school that you either do or don’t like?

WRITE- take copious notes, immediately following the visit, which will help you remember the differences between schools now and help you write your supplements in the fall.
DON’T...

JUDGE a school by a tour guide (would you say you had a horrible meal just because the waiter isn’t good?) or other people on the tour.

OVERLOAD – or try to look at more than 2 schools in one day. If you schedule your visits too tightly, you won’t have time to explore the campus and surrounding area a bit on your own.

Some suggestions of things to do while you are on campus (before or after the information session and tour):

- Visit the student center or dining hall and have a cup of coffee or meal. Check out the students- Are they friendly? What are they wearing? Are they sitting and chatting with their friends or grabbing food and running with their head down?
- Poke around – if you are interested in biology, find the building that houses those labs and walk around it if you can. If you see a professor sitting in his/her office, introduce yourself.
- Visit the library – are there students there? Are they studying or hanging out?
- Drive or walk around a bit in the area surrounding the campus.

Some questions to ask your tour guide to get him/her away from “the facts”:

- What has been your favorite class? Why?
- How big is each of your classes this semester?
- Have you met with any of your professors outside of class? Do you find them receptive/helpful/accessible?
- Do you have a career counselor/advisor? Have you met him or her? Will he/she help you seek out opportunities while you are an underclass student or just when you are graduating?
- Did you get the housing you wanted this year?
- Are there any unique traditions on campus?
- Did you know what you wanted to study when you came here? Did you change your mind?
- What are some of the things you did this past week/weekend other than going to class?
- Why did you choose this school?