

College Visit 101

Questions Parents and Students Should Ask During a College Visit

The Basics

This list is meant to provide prospective students and parents with ideas of people to talk with during an on-campus visit, as well as important questions to ask them. Keep in mind that it is important to seek answers from a variety of students and college officials in order to get a well-rounded view of the college. A campus tour is the best place to ask questions! You get to see where classes are held and pick the brain of a current student - take advantage of it!

- ❑ Ask questions about things that are most important to you- no question is too stupid (but remember to keep them polite).
- ❑ Try to ask the same questions at each school you visit so that you have a point of comparison between the schools.
- ❑ Take a tour and interact with your guide. Ask him or her questions about student life and his or her personal experiences. It is important to get a first-hand student perspective on things. Also, tour guides love feedback!

Questions for Student Tour Guides (and other students):

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

1. Why did you choose this college?
2. What other schools did you consider?
3. What do you like most about this school?
4. What do you wish you could change?
5. 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? Do they communicate with students via phone or email?
- ❑ How effective is your adviser? 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 introductory level classes?
- ❑ Are there study support groups or tutoring programs available? Do they cost extra?
- ❑ Is there an honors college or are there special honors programs?
- ❑ What are some special programs available to students, such as study abroad or pre-professional programs? 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 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 a computer? Is the campus more Mac or PC friendly?
- Does a student need to have a personal computer? Are there any models that are suggested or required? Are there discounts or group rates available?
- Is wireless access available 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, etc.)
- How are roommate assignments made? Can one 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 meals/week? 20 meals/week? 14 meals/week?)
- How is the food? Is it the same in every dining hall, or are there options?
- Are students allowed to have cars (what about first year students)? How is parking handled?

Extracurricular 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 bands 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 at school? Are on-campus jobs available?
- What are some of your college's big campus events (Homecoming, Family Weekend, Alumni W, 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? Does the school participate in NCAA Division I, II, or III or NAIA?
- What sports does the university offer at the varsity level or at the club/intramural level? How many students get involved in intramurals? Are there any exercise classes offered?
- What type of gym facilities are available and what type of access do non-athletes have to these facilities?
- Is there an additional cost to use facilities or participate in activities?
- How does the athletic 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 questions 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, and presentations in a semester class?
- Do you offer opportunities for students to engage in research? Do you often mentor students?
- Who teaches introductory courses – graduate students or professors?
- How do you make yourself accessible to your students?
- If tutoring is needed, what arrangements are made for the student?
- How many students do you advise at one time?
- What is the 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 or outside of class?

Questions for Admissions Counselors:

Now, ask your admissions counselor questions about the college overall - what is the school known for, and what kind of students typically attend? How diverse is the school and what do students go on to do after graduation?

- Why do students select this college?
- What is distinctive about this college?
- How would you describe the profile of a typical student who attends this college?
- What is the process used to evaluate a student’s application? How important are the SATs in the final decision?
- Do you recalculate a student’s grade point average (GPA)?

- ❑ If I apply for financial aid, does that reduce my chance of being admitted to this college?
- ❑ What are the graduation requirements? Are there any general requirements that one often takes as a first-year student? What about a first-year seminar?
- ❑ Are there opportunities for 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? in 5 years?
- ❑ After graduation, what is the career placement rate and/or graduate school acceptance percentage (ask about specific fields or graduate programs important to you)?
- ❑ What kinds of things are your most recent alumni doing?
- ❑ How does the college accept and apply AP, IB and transfer credits?
- ❑ Does the college have a career center? How many students does it serve each year?
- ❑ What resources are available for student and graduates seeking jobs?
 - Resume assistance? — Cover letter workshops?
 - Mock interviews? — Alumni network?
 - Job fairs? — Research library for careers?
- ❑ Is there software for electronic transmission of resumes to potential employers?
- ❑ What internship possibilities are there for me? Are there opportunities to complete internships for credit? How does one find internships?

*****Ask an Admissions Counselor about your chances of Admission. If you aren't admissible, NONE of the questions in this document matter!**

Take an unofficial copy of your high school transcript of your courses, grades and SAT and/or ACT scores. Look the Admissions Counselor in the eye and ask for an honest read on your chances.

Questions for Financial Aid Officers:

- ❑ Do you offer Academic Scholarships? If so, what are the scholarship award levels and the criteria for each level? Are students automatically considered or is there a separate application process? Do you offer other non-need-based scholarships? How do you apply for them?
- ❑ For need-based Financial Aid, do you require any additional financial information beyond what's on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)? If so, do you use the College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile? 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.
- ❑ What is the average unmet demonstrated financial need if the college doesn't meet 100% of 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 Loan for Undergraduate Study (PLUS) loan money in meeting need?

SELECTING A COLLEGE — ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

A COLLEGE PLANNING CHECKLIST



The **Gallup-Purdue Index**, a recent survey of 30,000 U.S. college graduates, found that those who have achieved great jobs and great lives were more likely to be personally engaged with a faculty member, have participated in an internship, been involved in extracurricular activities and have graduated with minimal student debt. These findings held true regardless of the type of four-year institution — public or private non-profit college; a highly selective institution or a less selective institution; or a top 100-ranked school in *U.S. News & World Report* vs. other schools.

As you visit schools in search of the right fit, take these questions along, expect answers, and make an informed choice that will lead to a great job and a great life.

Remember: This is only the first step. Students who actively engage in their college experience are more likely to see a return on their investment.

FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

- What kind of mentorship opportunities does the college/university offer, e.g., with faculty, graduate students or upperclassmen?
- What's the percentage of students involved in long-term projects, e.g., research opportunities for undergraduate students or semester-long projects?
- How are faculty members evaluated by the college/university? Is mentoring/direct interaction to support students one of the elements of evaluation?
- How does the college/university support faculty-student interaction outside the classroom, e.g., a faculty member joining a group of students for lunch, service learning, and faculty advising of student organizations?

ASK ABOUT FACTORS THAT ARE IMPORTANT FOR YOUR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

- Professors will excite me about learning.
- Instructors will care about me as a person.
- Mentors will encourage me to pursue my goals.
- Projects may take a semester or more to complete.
- Internships are available to apply what I learned in class.
- Extracurricular activities are available to connect me with students with similar interests and with opportunities to try something new.

Answers here will place the focus on the quality of your learning experience, those intangibles that can define your four years at college. You also will get a sense of the university's emphasis in preparing your leadership and critical-thinking skills. The Gallup-Purdue Index showed that graduates with at least one professor who excited them about learning, cared about them as a person and was a mentor, have more than double the odds of being engaged at work after graduation and thriving in their lives. Make sure you are proactive in pursuing high-impact opportunities, and that the school you choose is committed to your success in these ways.

63%

OF COLLEGE STUDENTS HAD **AT LEAST ONE PROFESSOR** WHO EXCITED THEM ABOUT LEARNING

GALLUP-PURDUE INDEX

HIGH-IMPACT EXPERIENCES

- What internships/co-ops does the college/university offer to students, e.g., work arrangements where students can apply directly what they are learning in the classroom?
- What percentage of students are involved in internship/co-op programs?
- Are scholarships or stipends available to support study-abroad programs?
- What does the college/university do to promote all students' active involvement in campus organizations, extracurricular activities and volunteerism?

These answers align with the university's mission for preparing you for your dream career or putting you on the path to an advanced degree. Answers also highlight the university's focus on career services, placement initiatives and counseling. If job placement is a priority at the school, companies are likely to be regular campus visitors, seeking the best and brightest to join their team after graduation. According to the Gallup-Purdue Index, graduates who had experiential and deep learning, such as a job/internship or long-term school project, and who were involved in extracurricular activities and organizations, had double the odds of being engaged at work and having a great sense of well-being.

\$2.3M VS. \$1.3M

LIFETIME EARNINGS POTENTIAL FOR COLLEGE BACHELOR'S DEGREE VS. HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

LUMINA FOUNDATION

"Our survey clearly indicated that it wasn't so much where you go to college as much as it is how you go to college — what you extract from the campus experience. It also was clear that students whom faculty had engaged and, in turn, took the initiative to engage with faculty were more likely to experience higher well-being and satisfaction in their work and life."

— MITCH DANIELS, PRESIDENT, PURDUE UNIVERSITY



GALLUP

PURDUE
UNIVERSITY

AFFORDABILITY

- How much has your total Cost of Attendance (COA) risen in the past year?
- What is the average debt of your students who borrow?
- What is the average starting salary of graduates in the major in which I'm interested?
- Do you plan a tuition freeze? Do you have a guaranteed tuition rate for four years so I'll know the costs for my college career?
- What is the four-year graduation rate for my major? Average time to degree? How does the institution facilitate students graduating in four years?

Many colleges and universities could be a great educational fit for you, but financial fit and return on your investment are fundamental to college choice. It's critical to factor in total cost of attendance for four years — make sure that your short list of colleges clearly display all costs, including room and board, books and other expenses. Tuition is only one part of the college cost. Check if there are differential fees for the major in which you are interested. Using the Net Price Calculator (see below), consider the total you may have to borrow. A good rule of thumb is that total borrowing for your degree should not exceed your expected first-year salary after graduation. Time is money, both in college costs and delayed earning power. So the ability to graduate in four years is important. Also, make sure you research and meet deadlines for scholarship and need-based aid consideration. Missing deadlines and priority dates may mean you miss out on money.



INVEST WISELY

The College Board's Net Price Calculator helps you determine how to borrow responsibly and compare actual costs

<http://netpricecalculator.collegeboard.org>

GALLUP-PURDUE INDEX

Purdue University, in partnership with Gallup and Lumina Foundation, released the inaugural Gallup-Purdue Index in May 2014. Find the full report at www.gallup.com