



## Non-Random Thoughts about Visiting Colleges

With over 4,000 colleges in the U.S., the decision of where to apply can be overwhelming for your student. The campus visit is an effective way to cut through the confusion and begin the search for a good match between student and college.

There are two main flavors of campus visits:

1. Casual visits: Set foot on campus and get the general feel of it.
2. In-depth visits: Closely scrutinize a college. Attend a class? Stay overnight?

The first flavor is well suited for freshmen and sophomores who are just starting to think about college or who are taking the next step, which is making a list of 10 to 20 colleges to which they might apply.

The second flavor, the in-depth visit, comes into play during two distinct time frames:

1. The summer before junior year through the fall of senior year. During this time the student narrows the list of possible colleges to a smaller number, such as 6 to 8, to which the student plans to apply. These visits are instrumental in helping the student to identify his or her first, second, third and fourth choices, plus his or her safety college(s).
2. April of senior year. Students are notified of acceptance by colleges by April 1<sup>st</sup> and have until May 1<sup>st</sup> to accept the offer. April visits help the student decide between their top 2 or 3 choices, if they have been accepted at multiple colleges.

### **The casual visit – simple, yet highly important**

The purpose of the casual visit is to get an idea of what size, location, climate and tone of a campus might interest the student. The question the student poses to him or herself is “Could I fit in here?” For example, if the student is a conservative dresser and is surrounded by nose rings, he or she is unlikely to be comfortable attending that college, and vice versa. As a freshman even a drive-by visit may be useful. Sophomores should literally go one step further and step out of the car and onto the campus. The standard student-led campus tour may be helpful on these visits.

These casual visits can be made on your normal family vacation trips and via local stops at CU (large university in a small city), University of Denver (medium-sized university in a large city) and Colorado College (small college in a suburban setting). Wherever you are going, just make it a point to stop in at a nearby college. Your student may want to follow the example in Harvard Schmarvard<sup>[1]</sup>, Chapter 11, and make up his or her own “five factors” to consider for each campus they see. One way or another, help your student insert some fun in these initial visits, lest they turn into a match for the Chapter 11 heading, “Forced Marches Through the Quad”.

### **The in-depth visit**

There are numerous books and articles your student can consult to get a checklist of things to do for an in-depth visit. Three ready references are available in the Post-Grad Center at Fairview:

1. A two-sided goldenrod paper entitled “The College Campus Visit”. It includes some helpful tips, such as try to visit during the academic year, and try to include at least one weekday when classes are in session. It also lists things to do before the student visits, things to include in the visit, sample questions to ask admission officers or professors and sample questions to ask a tour guide.

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<sup>[1]</sup> By Jay Mathews (Prima Publishing, 2003)

2. The book Harvard Schmarvard (see Chapter 11: Forced Marches Through the Quad") by Jay Mathews (Prima Publishing, 2003). This includes checklists from various books, a helpful section about casual versus in-depth visits, and Mathews' 5 criteria for campus visits.
3. The book The Fiske Guide to Getting Into the Right College (see Chapter 13: How to Size Up a Campus) by Edward B. Fiske & Bruce G. Hammond (Sourcebooks, Inc., 2002). This includes sections on cutting through the propaganda, five good questions to ask the tour guide, tips on things to observe as one walks the campus, and sampling the nightlife.

**In closing**

Don't delay! Help your student start his or her visits sooner rather than later. Remember, the goal is to find a good match between the student and the college and that does take some thought and time.

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