



ACT

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

Conquering
Campus Visits

Introduction

Why is visiting colleges important?

Would you buy a new pair of shoes without trying them on first?

You could search online or walk around the store and marvel at all the features and styles that are displayed. But until you lace up those new kicks and walk around in them, you won't know if they're truly the right fit.

The same can be said about colleges and universities.

You can exhaust yourself with research into campus life, classroom dynamics, and housing options, but until you take the time to visit a campus and experience firsthand what it's like to be a student, you won't know if that college is the right choice for you.

A school may look great on paper or online, but you might be surprised when you step foot on campus for the first time. Successful college visits give you insights into what your life might be like if you decided to attend a college or university and if it matches with what you want.

THIS EBOOK WILL:

- **help you decide when to visit campuses,**
- **tell you how to set up a visit,**
- **suggest activities you should do during a visit,**
- **give you tips to make the most of your visit, and provide resources...**

...so you can plan, prepare, and complete an effective campus visit.



Chapter 1

WHEN SHOULD I VISIT COLLEGES?



Chapter 1:

When should I visit colleges?

It's never too early to begin considering and planning your future.

So, if you've already researched some colleges and created a list, you're ready to tour.

If you haven't started looking into colleges, the beginning of your junior year is a great time to begin researching and adding some to your list.

By the end of your junior year—and before you submit applications—you should visit a majority of your considerations. Doing this will help narrow your list. You'll eliminate those that weren't a good fit. And you might be surprised at which colleges move up on your list.

It's best to visit a college when classes are in session. This will give you a good idea of what campus life is like during school.

HERE ARE SOME GOOD TIMES TO TAKE A CAMPUS VISIT:

- **During your Spring Break (as long as the college doesn't have the same break)**
- **While visiting friends or family close to/ on a campus you're considering**
- **Mid-August, before your school starts but when colleges are beginning their fall session**

Be sure to make arrangements in advance if you're going to miss class for a college visit. Check in with your teachers so you know if you can afford to miss and still stay ahead of the lessons, and homework. Give your counselors a heads up, too. Counselors can give you advice that will help you make the most of your college visit.

If summer is the only time you can get to campus, that's OK. Afterward, if you like the campus, you should try to reschedule a visit when school is in session.

Chapter 2

HOW DO I SET UP A CAMPUS VISIT?



Chapter 2:

How do I set up a campus visit?

The first and best place to look for information on setting up a visit is a college's website—specifically, its admissions page.

From the admissions page, you can find helpful information such as how to schedule a walking tour of the campus, an information session with a certain department, and/or financial aid meetings.

But don't be limited to what you see on the admissions page.

Contact the admissions office to set up additional tours and information sessions like one-on-one meetings, staying overnight in the dorms, eating a meal in the school cafeteria, checking out extracurriculars, and other activities you may be interested in.

You want to understand everything you can about the campus so you can make a proper decision about it. This is why you should plan a variety of activities.



Chapter 3

WHAT SHOULD I DO DURING A VISIT?



Chapter 3:

What should I do during a visit?

We believe only part of the college experience is about what happens in the classroom.

There are multiple out-of-class activities and organizations that can affect your decision process (community, safety, clubs, opportunities to travel, etc.).

That's why we've identified nine activities, academic and non-academic, that'll help you get a full sense of the campus you're visiting.

1 TAKE A CAMPUS TOUR, THEN TOUR ON YOUR OWN:

During your scheduled campus tour, you'll interact mostly with your tour guides and other prospective students. This is a great time to get an introduction to the campus and an idea of where students commonly study and hang out.

During or after the tour, don't be afraid to pick your guides' brains about why they attended this school and how they made that decision. Something they say might resonate with you or relate to your situation.

Your tour guide could also be a great resource for answering general campus questions. Questions like:

- **How do I get around campus?**
- **Can I bring a car on campus? Do I need one?**
- **What kind of academic support is on campus?**
- **Do you feel safe on campus, and what measures are in place to ensure student safety?**
- **What are the housing options my first year?**
- **What kind of health services are available?**

AFTER YOUR SCHEDULED TOUR, TAKE SOME TIME ON YOUR OWN TO EXPLORE THE CAMPUS. Do your research beforehand, and pick out places where you want to spend some time. Visit different department buildings, student common areas, dorms, cafeterias, or ride a bus around.

Could you see yourself walking around this campus every day? Does it fit your preference of size and busyness? Do you enjoy the aesthetic? Is the campus too quiet or noisy?

In the end, listen to your gut. If you're feeling positive and comfortable on campus, that's a sign that the school is a good fit.

Chapter 3:

What should I do during a visit?

2 EXPLORE THE SURROUNDING AREA

Taking a tour around the city is just as important as the campus visit. You want both the campus and its community to be a good fit. Can you picture yourself living there?

Find answers to some of the same questions you had on your campus tour.

- **How do people get around town?**
- **What kinds of restaurants are available? Social activities?**
- **Do you feel safe?**
- **Is it a big city? A smaller town? What's your preference?**
- **How integrated is the town with the campus? Is that important to you?**

3 MEET WITH A DEPARTMENT ADVISOR

If you can, it's a good idea to meet with an advisor who presides over the major you intend to study. Doing so will provide a good picture of that department and what resources, activities, and seminars are provided.

Make an effort to ask:

- **Who teaches courses for first-year students?**
- **Will professors teach my courses or TAs?**
- **How large are the classes?**
- **What's the faculty-to-student ratio?**
- **Who will be my academic advisor?**
- **What kind of academic support is supplied in this department?**

Usually, you can schedule this meeting through the department.

4 MEET WITH AN ENROLLED STUDENT

To understand what life is like from a student's perspective, the best sources might be students themselves. Ask someone in the admissions office if you can talk with an enrolled student representative at the university, especially a student matching your interest in major.

This is a chance to get some honest answers about the school.

Some questions could be:

- **How easy is it to meet with faculty?**
- **Are you able to register for the classes you want?**
- **What activities are available for students?**
- **What do students do for fun on campus? In the community?**

Chapter 3:

What should I do during a visit?

5 SIT IN ON A CLASS

The best way to figure out what classes will be like is to sit in on a first-year class.

Is it a lecture? If so, what is the lecture style? How engaged are the students? OR is it a smaller class that's more discussion based?

After you observe one of these classes, compare it to your learning style and preferences. Do you learn better in a lecture or in a discussion? Do you prefer a hands-on approach to learning or watching someone?

6 EAT IN THE DINING HALL

Depending on the size of the campus, you may have multiple dining options. When school is in full swing, you might not have time or the means to cook for yourself. The dining hall might be the quickest, simplest, and often cheapest option for food.

While you're on your visit, sample some of the food. Check for variety, ordering options, taste, and how the dining hall handles health or diet concerns, if you have any.

Ask what kinds of meal plans are offered. Some will have options between unlimited meals and one meal per day. Understand your meal preferences, and imagine which option you might pick.

7 SPEND THE NIGHT IN A DORM

Touring the dorms is one thing, but getting a chance to stay overnight is a richer experience. It's a chance to get a better impression of life on campus and develop relationships with new friends. Check before your college visit to see if sleeping over is a possibility.

Note if the students made you feel welcome. Are there dorm activities? Are you comfortable with the level of privacy?

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8 TAKE A LOOK AT THE SCHOOL NEWSPAPER AND BULLETIN BOARDS AND/OR ATTEND A PLAY OR SPORTING EVENT

Checking out the school newspaper will clue you in on news and issues important on campus.

A bulletin board might offer insights into the activities, Greek life options, and services the college offers. You might also see what intramural or recreational sports are available.

9 MEET WITH A FINANCIAL AID OFFICER

This is a great idea if you're wondering what types of financial aid the college offers. Ask:

- **What's the total cost of college?**
- **Am I eligible for any scholarships that I might not know about?**
- **What's the FAFSA deadline for the school?**
- **What kinds of grants or loans can I take out?**
- **What's my projected debt upon graduation?**

This list isn't exhaustive. It's designed to get you thinking about different aspects of college. If you have more activities planned, great! Schedule what you need to make an informed decision.

TWO IMPORTANT THINGS THAT WILL MAKE YOUR VISIT MORE BENEFICIAL:

- **Document it with a notebook, camera, or voice recorder**

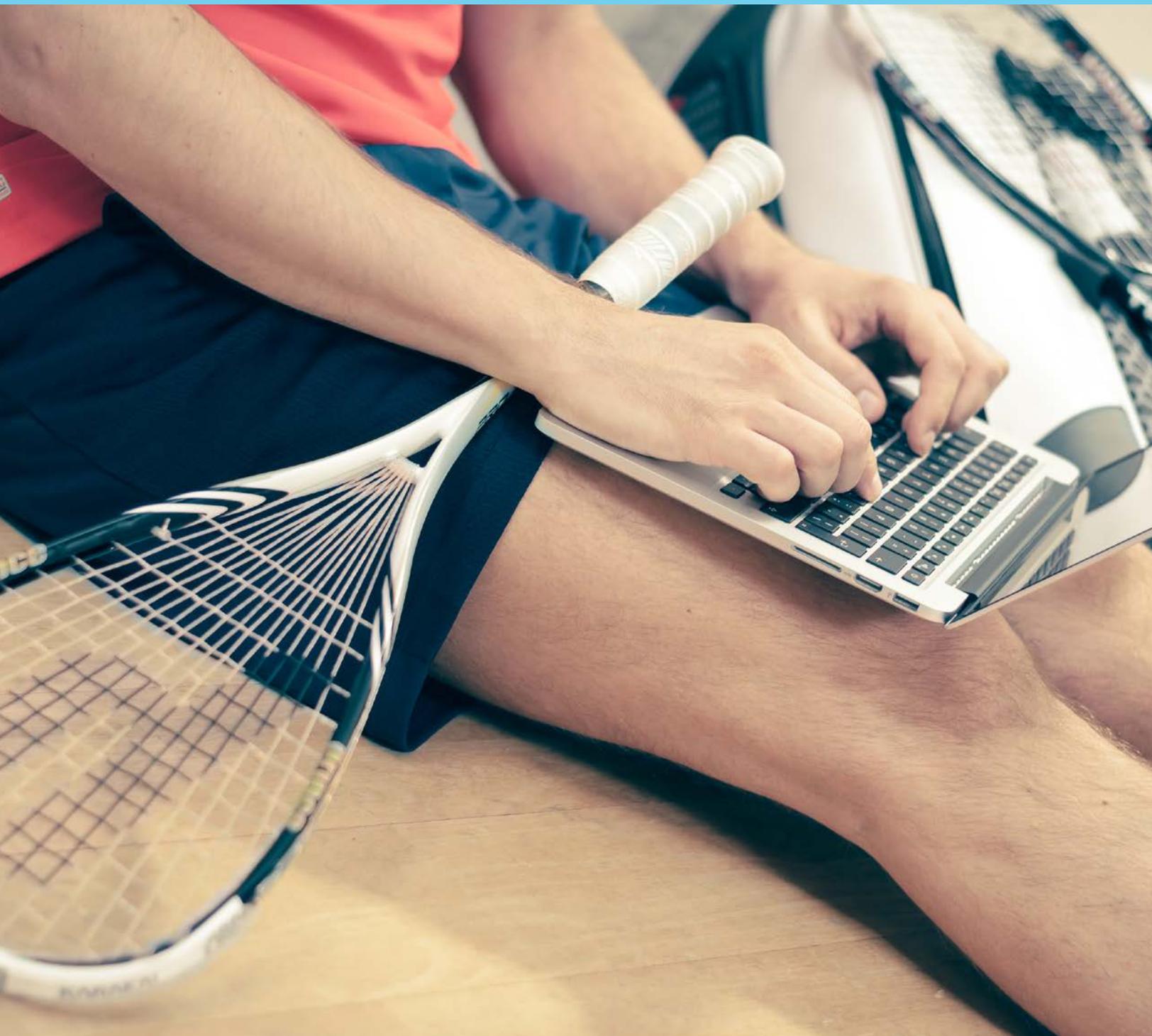
This will help you capture gut reactions and easily jot down or voice information you gathered along the way. This is also helpful after the visit, when you're trying to remember what you did and all you learned. Reviewing your notes will help remind you of the emotions and reactions you had to certain aspects on and around campus.

- **Bring a parent, guardian, or friend**

It's great to have someone there, someone who knows you well, to help digest all the information you receive. It can be someone to help talk through reactions and thoughts about the school and give you another opinion on the experience.

Chapter 4

NOW WHAT? WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER I VISIT?



Chapter 4:

Now what?

What should I do after I visit?

STEP ONE:

Review and expand upon your notes when you get home. Try to summarize your overall impression of the college. Do you still feel the same now that you're done? Rate where that college falls on your list now.

Also, analyze your visit. What activities were most effective in helping you evaluate schools? Duplicate those for the next visit. What activities were not effective in helping you evaluate? Avoid those or find another activity in its place.

STEP TWO:

A nice, meaningful touch is to send a thank-you letter to the people you interacted with.

- **Admissions staff**
- **Tour guide(s)**
- **Faculty or advisors**
- **College students**

It's the professional and respectful thing to do, and it might help you get the admissions office's attention if you decide to apply there..

STEP THREE:

When you've submitted applications and know where you've been accepted, you might revisit those colleges for a second look.

A final word

Take your time. Don't rush to any judgments about the college after a visit. Review your notes and talk it over with your parents. **Weigh all the options. In the end, ask yourself if you can see yourself there. If you can, then you may have found the right fit for you.**

FIND MORE TIPS ON HOW TO CONQUER YOUR CAMPUS VISITS AT ACTSTUDENT.ORG.



Questions and Reflection

Print this worksheet and take it with you
on your campus visit.

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