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Making the Most of Your College Visit

By Julissa

Posted Mar. 1, 2006 — Here are my tips for making the most of your college visits.

College brochures and websites can only show you a small sample of what life on a college campus is like. To really get a feel for a college or university you should take a walk around the campus, stay overnight, sit in on a few classes and hang out with some of the students.

The visit will give you the opportunity to get a first-hand view of the schools you are applying to and a chance to get all of your questions answered.

1. Plan your visit out in advance.

Put in a call to the college admissions office and tell them you'd like to set up a campus visit. Be sure to ask if an overnight visit can be arranged and an interview with the admissions office.

But before you pick a date for your visit go online and check out the schools website to make sure that your travel dates don't land on any days when the school is closed. You might also want to check and see which classes will be in session that you might be able to sit in on.

2. Make the visit count.

Try and experience and participate in as much as you can during your visit.

- Take a campus tour.
- Eat in the dining hall.
- Pick up financial aid information and forms.
- Sit in on classes.
- Pick up course catalogs.
- Talk to a professor or department head in your chosen major.
- Talk to team coaches if you are interested in playing sports.
- Spend the night in a dorm.
- Read student publications and check out bulletin boards to get a feel for the campus scene.

I know it's a long laundry list but these are the best ways to get the most out of your visit.

3. Make a checklist of which college characteristics are important to you.

This will help you evaluate the schools you are visiting and narrow down your choices. You should ask yourself the following questions during your visit and write down the responses:

- Do you feel overwhelmed in a large lecture hall?
- What are the class sizes like and what's the student-to-teacher ratio?
- Is Greek life available on campus?
- Is your major available?
- Are you comfortable with the campus location?
- Is the student body diverse enough for you?

Add any other characteristics that you are looking for as well. This list will come in handy when it's time to sit down and choose the right college for you!

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4. Stop by a few key departments.

Visit the financial aid department and see if a counselor is available to meet with you and pick up any and all brochures and forms that you can. And don't forget to ask about scholarships—get that free money y'all. Avoid loans as much as you can.

The admissions office is another key place to stop by: chances are you will need to schedule an appointment in advance. But this is a good idea and it might even increase your chances of being accepted to the school.

And don't forget to check out the career services center—you want to make sure the school has enough resources to help you find work study gigs, internships and a job after graduation.

5. Bring a notebook and a camera.

Even though you think you're gonna remember everything about the schools you visit—chances are you won't. You'd be surprised how colleges start to look alike once you've seen a few. So take notes and pictures to help you remember what made each campus unique.

6. Don't freak out if you can't make it to all of the schools you want to visit.

You can enjoy a virtual campus tour right from the comfort of your home. A DVD series called the "u" which was developed by a recent college graduate allows you to get a virtual campus tour from 50 of the most popular colleges. Log onto www.theu.com for more information.