

## Asking the Tough Questions

Asking great, appropriate questions during a college visit identifies you as a thinker. That's a good thing—a way to set you apart from the wandering masses trampling across the campus during those tours and information sessions. To distinguish yourself, ask questions that try to go beyond the obvious.

Below you will find some areas where additional questions may help you sort out which schools may be a good match for you. The school you select will be your home until you finish the program you choose, so the more you know the happier you will probably be with your choice.

Click below to find the tough questions you should ask when you make your college visit:

[Academics](#)

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### Academics: Asking the Tough Questions

Remember - it is your job to write the colleges, get the application materials, housing and aid forms, and, complete and submit the paperwork on time—preferably by the priority date.

- What academic elements are considered in the admissions process—courses, grades, test scores, rank, interests, institutional needs, essays, recommendations, interviews? How important are each of these factors? Some of these factors can be assessed by using numbers and some can't.
- Which academic programs on campus are the most popular?
- What are the largest classes you could have as a freshman or sophomore? How many large classes can you expect?
- Who teaches the freshman classes? Teaching Assistants and Graduate Assistants can be fine teachers—just know who you are getting for teachers.
- (If this applies to you) Are there any special support services if you are a special needs student (ADD, ADHD, LD, etc.)? How do these support services function and any additional cost charged for these services?
- Is there an Honor Code? How does it operate?
- Is there an Honors Program for talented students? How do you qualify?

### Social/Recreational: Asking the Tough Questions

- What activities do students participate in during their free time—on campus (school sponsored) and in the community?
- Is the campus Greek? (In other words, does it have fraternities and sororities?) If so, what percent of the student body participates in Greek life? Are parties open? How do students who elect not to participate in the Greek system fit in?
- What are the most popular extracurricular activities? Are there any particularly notable activities?

- What portion of the student body lives on campus? What portion of the student body remains on campus for the weekends?
- What transportation options are available-to and from campus both for trips to the mall and for treks to transportation centers for trips home?
- What are the issues on campus that charge up the students?
- Can freshmen have cars on campus? What is the fee for having a car on campus?

### **Auxiliary Services: Asking the Tough Questions**

- Where do students go if they have a medical emergency?
- What tutoring, counseling, and support services are available on campus and how are they accessed?
- What computer access will you have? Do you need to bring your own computer? Are the dorms wired for Internet/e-mail services?
- What laundry facilities are available?
- What are the safety issues on campus? How are they addressed? Ask for a crime report.
- Federal law requires schools to provide safety information to students.

### **Housing/Food Services: Asking the Tough Questions**

- Is campus housing guaranteed for all four years? What percent of students live on campus all four years?
- What housing options exist? (Honors housing? Theme housing? Single sex? Coed? Greek? Honors?)
- What meal plans are available? Are freshmen required to purchase a specific type of meal plan?
- What hours may students access food services?

### **Paying For It: Asking the Tough Questions**

- What is the yearly cost of attendance, including books, tuition, fees, housing, meal plans? In other words, what is the all-inclusive cost?
- Does your ability to pay the full cost of attendance have any impact on the college's decision to admit you?
- Which financial aid forms are required? The most common two are the FAFSA and the CSS PROFILE, but some schools have institutional or school specific forms and some states have special forms-just ask to see what you need!
- What percent of entering freshman received aid? What was the average freshman aid package? Is there a way aid is packaged-loans first, for example? If you are unhappy with your aid package, is it negotiable at all?
- If you demonstrate need, will the school be able to prepare a financial aid package that will meet 100% of your demonstrated need?
- What types of payment plans exists for paying the Estimated Family Contribution?

## Four other college visit tips:

By Stephen J. Pemberton

- **Bring a journal...**at the end of your visit jot down some of your thoughts while they're fresh in your mind...you can refer back to them later especially when you compare schools
- **Bring a backpack...**put some books in it and walk around the campus as if you're already a student...you'll get a definite vibe about the environment
- **Talk to strangers...**that's right...you're certain to see tour guides who are hired because they are glowing and can walk backwards and talk at the same time but make it a point to speak with someone who is not affiliated with the admission office
- **Have lunch on campus...**another personal favorite...not only will you learn about the student body but you'll also find out how good the food is!

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## What if I can't visit?

Now there will be a lot of schools that you can't visit. Perhaps your schedule doesn't give you the chance or maybe it doesn't interest you enough to make a visit but there are still several ways to find out about a school.

- **Talk to your counselor.** They may have visited the college or better yet may know the name(s) of graduates of (the high school) who are going to school there.
- **Many schools have videos or virtual tours.** Some videos may be in your guidance counselor's office or you can go on-line to see the virtual tour. If you go to Cornell University's website, for example, you'll see a live camera view of the campus...

Call the school and ask them to put you in contact with an undergraduate. Many colleges have students who volunteer to give tours or contact interested students...

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you leave the campus (in no particular order).

Is it easy to get around campus? Can I walk to and from classes?

Where is the central gathering place for students?

Is the campus self-contained or fairly spread out?

Are the dorms segregated by class/ by major? (Note: freshmen usually live in designated areas.)

What means of transportation are available when I want to go off-campus?

Are there construction projects on-going around campus? (This is a good thing as it signals good facilities.)

Do the facilities appear to relatively new?

What do students do on the weekends? On-campus or off-campus activities?

You will undoubtedly want to add your own questions to this list as you visit different campuses. Dig deep. Ask lots of questions and try to ask current undergraduates. They are the real experts on campus and will provide more insight than any other resource.