

The College Visit

One of the most important parts of your college search is the campus visit. Visiting colleges on your list will give you a firsthand impression of the students, faculty, staff, facilities, and programs. On a visit, you can learn what the admissions office is looking for in its applicants, gain a feeling for the academic and social atmosphere, see the study/ living/recreation facilities, talk with students, and get a sense of the surrounding community. We encourage college visits starting in the spring of junior year.

Why Visit?

A college website, catalog, or view book can only show you so much. To get a feel for the school, you need to walk around the campus, sit in a class, and visit the dorms. It's also an opportunity to see and experience everyday life on campus.

When to Visit?

Admissions offices are open all year, but visiting when classes are in session is best. Check a school's website for visit information; many ask you to sign up online for tours and information sessions ahead of time.

- One of the best times to visit is spring break of your junior year. At Seattle Prep, we suggest you visit one large, one medium, and one small school to get a feeling for each. If possible, include a large state and a small private school on your tour for comparison.
- Some schools offer special visit days. These are usually daylong programs that will introduce you to many areas of the school.

Planning Your Visit - Things to Do or Consider in Your Plan

- A good campus visit takes two to four hours, including time to get a sense of the surrounding town or area. Don't try to visit more than two schools in one day.
- Contact the admissions office or visit the school's website for tour information.
- In addition to a campus tour and information session, you may want to include an admissions interview, a meeting with a faculty member in your area of interest, a meeting with a coach, and attending a class (allow extra time to schedule these).
- Take lots of pictures. You'll be amazed by how much information you'll collect from photos. Having a camera and jotting down a few notes and impressions will help you distinguish schools from one another. Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words!
- Contact former Seattle Prep students you might know at the school before you plan to visit. They'll give you an insider's look at the campus.
- Before you go, make a list of items that are important to you so you know what to evaluate: Start thinking about location, size, diversity, academic programs, social atmosphere.

What to Do When You Visit

- Focus on the people, place, and programs. Engage as many people as possible in conversation about the school.
- Look at campus publications to get more information about the community at large. A college newspaper will give you a sense of what the students are concerned about-something a tour guide is not likely to share.
- Wander through the student center, cafes, and bookstore and observe how students interact with each other.
- Go on an admissions tour and attend an information session. Think about questions that you may want to ask. Listen to the tour guide, but don't jump to conclusions about a school based solely on your experience with the tour guide.

Sit In On a Class:

1. Do the professors seem knowledgeable? Are they accessible for questions or concerns?
2. What is the role of a teaching assistant (TA) in the classroom? Do they replace the professor or assist the professor?
3. Are the students participating in classroom discussion? Are they engaged? Disengaged?
4. What kinds of work are the students doing? Are they conducting advanced research? Doing group projects?
5. What size are the classes? Is this representative of all classes on campus (or do intro courses tend to be bigger than advanced)?

Speak With Current Students:

1. What is their opinion of the professors? Do they find that they can approach their professors?
2. Do the professors spend time with students to be sure they understand the material?
3. How much time is expected for studying and other work outside of class?
4. What do they like most/least about the school?
5. How do they spend their free time? Ask a student what they did the previous weekend: Was it balanced between social activities and academics? Did they remain on campus?

Speak With an Admission Counselor:

1. Does the school offer Early Action (EA) or Early Decision (ED) options to students?
2. Do I need to declare a major on my application?
3. What unique programs does the school offer? Is there an honors program?
4. Are internships available? In the community? For credit during the school year? During the summer?
5. Based on my academic information, do I fit within the range of your profiled students?
6. Are there any unique admissions requirements? Is the Common Application accepted? Is there a supplement?

Speak With a Financial Aid Counselor:

1. Are there any school-specific scholarships available? How do I apply?
2. What is the total cost of attendance, including tuition, room and board, books, supplies, incidentals, parking, travel, and health insurance?
3. When is tuition due? Is there a payment plan?
4. What types of financial aid do you offer? Is financial aid need-based, merit-based, or both? What percentage of aid is in the form of loans? Grants? Scholarships? Work-study awards?
5. What financial aid forms and/or scholarship applications do you require?
6. What is the average financial aid award?
7. When do you notify families about their financial aid award?

What to do after the Visit

- Write down your impressions of the school. You may want to create a chart with topics you want to comment on for every college you visit. For this to be the most helpful, try to complete this chart immediately after the visit and before heading to another college visit.
- Write a thank-you note to any admissions persons you met during your visit. This makes a valuable impression.