Academics

- Are some majors or departments considered stronger or more popular than others?
- How large are the classes?
- Are the classes more lecture-based or discussion-based?
- Would you describe any classes as especially innovative or project-based?
- How many of the classes are taught by a professor, and how many are taught by a teaching assistant?
- Are the professors accessible outside of class?
- What kind of classes have smaller section meetings? What are they like?
- Are there any especially popular classes or must-have professors?
- How much freedom do freshmen have in choosing courses?
- Are students usually able to take their first choice courses?
- How's the Wi-Fi?
- How are freshman advisors assigned?
- Is it easy to change your major?
- How would you describe the freshman experience, in terms of advising or any classes that everyone has to take?
- Do the professors hold office hours? How often can students interact with professors outside of class?
- Can undergraduates work with professors on research?
- Are there honors programs or capstone classes? If so, what are they like?
- How many hours of class do students typically have each week? How much homework outside of class?
- Are finals more exam-based or project / essay-based?
- Where are the best places to study on campus?
- What are the hours for the library? Do these change during reading periods or exam weeks?
- Are there any research methods or databases I should learn about for my classes?
- Do any majors require seniors to write a thesis or complete a senior project?

As mentioned above, you might alter some of these questions to refer to a specific major or class. An intro science lecture, for instance, might contain hundreds of students, while a literature class could be discussion-based and limited to twelve students. Keep this in mind as you check out the rest of the questions on this college visit checklist.

Academic and Social-Emotional Support

- Can you get help from professors outside of the classroom?
- Is there free academic support or tutoring? Is it effective?

- What kind of resources are there for international student support and orientation?
- What kind of learning disability resources does the school offer?
- Is there a writing center to help with essays and research papers?
- Are academic advisers accessible and effective?
- Do the librarians help with research?
- Do students organize study groups or online discussion forums?
- Are there computer labs?
- How accessible and helpful is health services?
- Do students or administrators organize conversations for students to talk about their feelings on important issues and events?
- Are there social orientation programs for freshmen? Are they enjoyable?
- Is there career counseling? Is it helpful?

Research, Internship, and Study Abroad Opportunities

- What kind of opportunities exist for undergraduates to work on research or academic projects with professors?
- What kind of internships are available? Do a lot of students get internships?
- Are any departments known for their contribution to research?
- Do any majors prepare students to continue as researchers in a Master's or doctoral program?
- Are study abroad programs popular? Any ones in particular?
- Do most students study abroad on a program through the school or an external program?
- Do students of certain majors, like engineers, find it difficult to study abroad?
- Are there internship opportunities abroad?
- Are there opportunities through the school for summer internships or research?

Extracurriculars

- What are some of the most popular extracurriculars and why?
- What clubs or other opportunities exist for community service?
- Do sports play a large role on campus? What divisions are the sports teams? What about intramurals or exercise classes?
- Can you talk about the *fill-in-the-blank* club? (Examples might include the student newspaper, student magazine, international relations clubs, art groups, science clubs, musical performances, plays, bands, ensembles...whatever you're interested in!)
- In what ways do students connect with and volunteer in the surrounding community?

Residence Life

- What are the dorms like? Are there lounges, laundry, and kitchens? Shared or private restrooms?
- Do certain dorms appeal to students with different interests, like a “healthy living” dorm?
- Do most students live in the dorms? What about after sophomore or junior year? If they move off campus, do they live in apartments or shared houses?
- Are any students placed in triples?
- How are the resident counselors? Do they plan social events for freshmen to get to know one another?
- Do most students get along with their randomly assigned roommates?
- What would I do in case of a conflict or need for a room switch? Is that possible?
- What kind of food does the dining hall serve? Are there different options? How is it, really?
- Does the dining hall accommodate special dietary restrictions?
- Are there any aspiring chefs on campus who host occasional exclusive gourmet pop-up dinners? (This question may be exclusive to this kid and this kid. So cool!)

Campus Culture and Surrounding Area

- Where do students tend to hang out on and off campus?
- Are there movie theaters and concert venues? What about good cafes for getting work done or finding the perfect pumpkin spice latte?
- How would you describe the presence of Greek life? Do a lot of students belong to fraternities or sororities?
- How ethnically diverse is the campus?
- How many international students are there? What countries do they come from?
- Do students stick around or go home on weekends?
- What’s the party scene like? (This might be a question to ask current students away from the group tour.)
- Have there been any recent student protests? What were they protesting, and how did staff and faculty respond?
- What are some big campus events, like homecoming or alumni weekend?
- Is it easy to get around campus or get off campus without a car?
- What transportation options are there around campus?
- Is it a safe area to walk around at night? What kind of safety measures are in place?
- Do many students work on or off campus? How easy is it to find a part-time job?

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Personal Questions

As mentioned above, tour guides are **typically current students who went through the same college application process just a few years earlier!** Most tour guides are also, presumably, happy about their choice to attend. I wouldn't recommend prying into their high school grades and test scores, but there are other personal questions that are fair game, like the following:

- What's your favorite class and why?
- What's it like to study in your major?
- How helpful did you find your freshman year advisor?
- What do you wish you had known going into freshman year?
- What do you wish you had asked on a campus tour when you were in my place?
- What's a typical weekday like for you?
- What surprised you about campus life here?
- Is there anything you wish you had done differently to improve your experience here?
- Are there any things you'd like to change about the school?
- What would be your most important advice for freshman?
- What's your favorite spot you've discovered on campus since arriving?

Your tour guide, along with any other current students you meet, is a great resource for **honest, firsthand feedback about the student experience.** As students, they're likely to have similar experiences and concerns as you, and they can give you a sense of what's in store if you're accepted and decide to enroll in the college.

For more technical information on admissions policies and financial aid offers, you might set up meetings with the relevant offices. Read on for questions to ask the administrative staff.

Questions to Ask an Admissions Officer

Making contact with the admissions office can not only get your questions answered. It can also get your **"demonstrated interest"** on file, which may help when it comes time to review your application. Rather than appearing as an anonymous applicant, admissions officers may recognize you from a meeting, email, or other records of contact. Not all schools keep track of this, but for some, establishing some kind of relationship may help show your enthusiasm for the school and thereby give you a bit of an edge.

If you want to meet with an admissions officer, make sure to set up a meeting via email or calling beforehand. If it's application season, usually March and April, try to schedule this a few weeks early to **make sure they're not too busy to meet with prospective students.** Then have your list of questions ready to show that you prepared and are ready to make the most of your conversation. Here are a few questions you might ask.

- What's unique about this college?
- What leads most students to choose this college?
- What qualities and experiences are you looking for in applicants?
- Can you tell me more about the application evaluation process?
- How large of a role do SAT scores play in admissions?
- Do you have any advice for applicants? Does this differ for early versus regular decision applications?
- What percentage of students graduate in four years?
- What are the college's most important values, and how does it demonstrate this to students?
- What sort of student would succeed here?
- What sort of student might *not* be happy here?
- Can you tell me about career placements or grad school acceptances for graduates?
- How do you help students prepare for post-grad employment?
- Do you have an active alumni network?

Just as the admissions office will have lots of facts and advice about the admissions process, the financial aid office can walk you through your financial application. The next section covers questions you might have for them.

Questions to Ask a Financial Aid Officer

Most schools offer a good deal of information about the cost of tuition, room and board, books, and other fees online, as well as the **steps to take to apply for financial aid.** If financial aid's an important factor for you, it could be helpful to meet with an officer and make sure you're doing everything you can to get your financial needs met.

I would suggest researching the website first, so you're **not asking about info that's readily available online.** Then you can use that base knowledge as a stepping off point for other queries, like the ones below:

- What kind of need-based financial aid do you offer?
- Do you meet 100% of demonstrated financial need?
- What information do you require besides the FAFSA?
- How many students receive merit-based scholarships? How much is offered?
- Are there other scholarships that students can apply for at the time of application?
- How much do students typically owe after graduating?
- Can I renegotiate my offer if it's lower than I expected?
- What are some opportunities for work-study?

The financial aid office is the best place for any and all your money-related questions. If you get the chance to **meet with a professor**, then you can shift back into academic mode.

Questions to Ask a Professor

Finally, meeting with a professor could be a great way to make contact and learn about a department and class, especially if you have a strong sense of what you want to study. You can learn about her teaching style, the department's approach, and any opportunities for independent projects or research.

- What are your expectations for students in your class?
- How can students succeed in your class?
- What are typical requirements, like exams, papers, or presentations in a semester?
- What kind of materials would I use in your class?
- What skills or knowledge would you consider to be prerequisites?
- Do you offer any opportunities for students to do research?
- What other opportunities are available outside of the classroom to reinforce my learning, like cultural clubs or festivals?
- How often do you meet with or mentor students outside of class?
- What are the strengths of your program? Department?
- What's the community of students who major in this program like? Do they act as peer mentors, collaborate on projects, or form study groups?
- What could I do to prepare for further research at the graduate level?
- Would I be required or able to write a senior thesis or do a capstone project?
- How much flexibility would I have in shaping my major or taking an interdisciplinary approach?

As you can see, there's a wide range of questions you could prepare to ask tour guides, admissions officers, financial aid officers, and professors. In addition to knowing what to ask, it can also be useful to **know what not to ask.** Are there any questions you shouldn't ask on your campus tours?

Questions to Avoid on College Visits

I know, I know, they say there are no dumb questions - but there may be some worth keeping to yourself on your college visits. For instance, I mentioned above that it would probably be**inappropriate to ask your tour guide to recite her high school resume** to see how your grades, scores, and involvements stack up. While she can talk about her experiences applying and attending, asking for specific info like that would probably cross the line from curious to prying.

On a similar note, you may avoid asking questions that are overly personal and not helpful to others in the group when you're on your tours. While it's fine to ask about certain departments, I**wouldn't advise sharing your life story** and then asking your tour guide (or a professor, for that matter) to speculate about your admissions chances. She probably can't speak to highly specific concerns, and

your fellow tour group members won't find it helpful either. If your question feels like TMI for a group setting, then cross it off your list.

A final good rule of thumb to follow is to **avoid asking basic questions that can be easily answered via Google or a quick search of the school's website.** For instance, questions like the following fall into that category:

- Do you have a psychology major?
- When was the school founded?
- How many students are in the freshman class?
- What was last year's rate of acceptance?

Based on these guidelines and suggestions, you probably have a sense of the kind of questions to ask on a college tour that will help you make the most of your campus visits. Most are prompts that may open into a more in-depth discussion. That being said, **how can you use these questions to prepare for your college tours?**

How to Prepare for Your College Tours

Your first step is scheduling and signing up online for your college tours, as well as any other meetings or overnight stays. The **best time to tour is when classes are in session** so you can get the truest sense of the college in action.

Since you should prepare questions and take notes on the answers, I recommend writing them down and bringing a notebook (paper or electronic) to take notes. You'll be getting a lot of information, along with walking around and seeing everything, so it will be **useful to have a record to which you can refer at the end of the day.**

You certainly don't need to go overboard with the college tour questions. I would suggest**preparing five to ten of your most important questions for each person (student, admissions officer, professor, etc).** You may find you should choose about three during your tour, while you may be able to ask a lot more during a one on one conversation or meeting. Better to over-prepare than under-prepare, and you could list your highest priority questions at the top to make sure you get to them first.

In addition to asking questions and jotting down notes on the responses, you should **take the time to observe everything going on around you.** Beyond viewing the facilities, try to notice how the staff responds to you or how students interact with one another. Perhaps most importantly, is it a place where you'd feel comfortable?

Finally, **spend some time writing and reflecting after your visit.** Does the school seem like a good fit with your personality, interests, and goals? Do you feel excited about the prospect of attending? At the end of the day, you must save the final questions for yourself.

What's Next?

Are you in the midst of researching colleges and narrowing down your college list? This guide has some seriously helpful suggestions for figuring out what you want and choosing the colleges that best match your goals.

Once you've found some exciting schools, head on over here to learn when to apply. Thiscomprehensive guide goes over the various application deadlines you need to know, along with some examples of regular and early deadlines for popular schools.

Finally, check out this guide on all the steps to apply to college, starting with choosing the best high school classes as early as freshman year and finishing with submitting your college apps!