

## **Don't get stuck at the wrong college; visit first!**

By Bill Morrison

### **Make it worthwhile**

How exactly then do you plan this visit? First and foremost, actually plan the visit.

Do not, I repeat, do not just show up and take a walk around the campus. Make an appointment to take a guided tour. If the school allows you to make an appointment with a member of the admission staff, do so. Preferably, with the staff member that recruits at your high school. He or she will fill out an interview form and make a note in your file that you visited. Be prepared with a couple of quality questions to display your interest in attending.

Staying on campus can give you some first hand experience as to what the dorms are like. Many universities offer overnights to prospective students, either through visit programs or on an individual basis; it's also a good way to save money on your trip.

Secondly, know beforehand what you want to get out of your visit. Come up with some specific criteria as to what you want in your college or university and judge the school based on those set criteria. In other words, think about what kind of schools there are, what they have to offer, and what you want in yours.

What questions do you have that the brochures and other materials have not been able to answer? Remember that the only stupid question is one that was not asked. If you want to know what the dorm food is like, ask. If you want to know what people do on weekends, ask. If you want to know what the nightlife is like, ask.

### **Ask around**

One thing to keep in mind as you put together your list of questions is to consider the source of the answer. Admission counselors and tour guides are good sources of information, but, let's face it, they are biased. Do you think the admission office is going to hire a student guide who will bash the school? So, always consider the source. Make a point to ask a student sitting in the commons or find a student who works as a waitress at the restaurant you eat at. Asking people who aren't trained to give the "right" answers will get you closer to the real digs on the school.

Finally, if possible, try to sit in on a class to get the feel for the school academically. If you are thinking of attending a large state school, will you be successful taking Psychology 101 with 500 others in a large lecture hall? Or what about a small, liberal arts college? If you want to be in a class with only fifteen other students, where the teacher always knows whether or not you're there and paying attention, it could be right for you. You'll have a much better idea of how you really feel about these issues once you actually sit in on a class. Attending a class that is in your chosen major may also give you the chance to speak with the professor about the department and its offerings. Admissions staff can set up these kinds of visits for you.

The old adage "Different strokes for different folks" is the key thing to remember here. Students that report satisfaction with their college choice tend to have higher grade point averages and graduation rates. In other words, being comfortable both academically and socially is important.

And if I haven't convinced you yet, know that many colleges and universities, especially the more selective ones, track applicant contacts to the college. A campus visit in your file might be just the thing to push the borderline student into the admit pool.

### **Questions to ask during a college visit**

Depending on whom you talk to, you'll get a wide range of views about a college during your campus visit. Ask the same questions of different people to get a good feel for what the truth is. For example, ask a student, a professor and an admissions officer about the difficulty (or ease) of an academic program.

### **Questions to ask college students**

- What are the more popular extracurricular activities (or ask specifically about the activity you are interested in)?
- Are you able to study in your dorm room?
- Do many students go home or away on weekends?
- Are professors accessible outside of class?
- Are campus jobs available?
- Were you able to register for all the classes you wanted?
- If you were to do it again, would you choose this college?
- Did you receive financial aid?
- What is the social life like at this school?
- Would you call this a Greek school?

### **Questions to ask an Admissions Officer**

- What are your most popular/distinguished programs?
- How many students will be in my first year courses? Are those courses taught by full-time faculty or by graduate assistants?
- Describe the college's resources for first-year students - computers, library, access to special equipment, such as in labs, etc.
- What kinds of work-study jobs are available?
- Am I likely to be admitted?
- What percentage of students receive financial aid and what does the typical package provide?
- Are there academic/talent scholarships available?

### **Questions to ask yourself on campus**

- Could I live in one of the dorm rooms I visit?
- Are the buildings on campus in good shape?
- Are the computers and lab equipment plentiful and new?
- Are common areas of dorms comfortable and do the facilities meet demand?
- Are the grounds attractive?
- Is the campus close enough - or far enough away - from the city for me?
- How is it getting around campus?

### **Questions to ask yourself in the classroom**

- Do students appear to be interested in the material?
- Do students participate in discussion?
- Do the students seem to have a relationship with the professor?
- Would I feel comfortable as a student in this setting?
- Is the material challenging enough for me?

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If you have questions or a topic you would like to hear about, email us at: [editor@myfootpath.com](mailto:editor@myfootpath.com).