

The College Visit

Making campus visits can be overwhelming. What distinguishes Washington University from Northwestern? Aren't they both mid-sized, academically competitive research universities located in or near cities with diverse student bodies? Distinguishing between colleges is an art, so how do you do it?

When should I visit?

It is never too early to visit a college campus.

Spring visits: Getting an early start by visiting during spring vacation can be advantageous, and you don't have to miss school. However, the colleges may be having their own breaks at that time. The admissions offices are very busy in March with admissions decisions, so tours, information sessions and interviews may be difficult to schedule. Consequently, it is best to visit after April 1.

Summer visits: The college admission representatives are not as busy and have more time for the visiting student. Your schedule is more flexible and you won't have to take valuable time from your high school classes. The disadvantage is that most of the full-time college students are not on campus. The students you do see are often visitors participating in summer programs and may not represent the typical student body.

Fall visits: The advantage of a fall visit is that school is in session. The disadvantage is that time away from school could impact your performance and you do want your first semester senior grades to be impressive.

Post admission visits: Some students like to make their campus visits after they have been accepted, and most colleges offer special weekends for these students.

What school should I visit?

Visit a variety of small, medium, and large public and private colleges and universities, as well as research universities and liberal arts colleges. Whenever possible, visit schools in different parts of the country.

How do I arrange for the visit?

The student should call the colleges at least three to four weeks prior to the intended visit. Refer to colleges' websites for times of tours and information sessions. Parents and counselors should not call. Colleges are looking for the self-starter who is mature and independent, not for the parent or counselor to take the initiative in setting up the trip.

Your visit should include:

- A campus tour
- An information session
- A class visit
- A meeting with a coach (if applicable)
- A visit to a dorm
- A visit to the Student Union
- A tour of the fitness center
- A tour of the surrounding neighborhood
- A visit to specific departments or labs of interest