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Making the most of your college visits

By Elizabeth LaScala



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD personally guides each student through each step of selecting and applying to well-matched schools for undergraduate and graduate school study. Over the past two decades, Elizabeth has placed hundreds of students in some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S. The number of clients taken is limited to ensure each applicant has personalized attention. Contact Elizabeth early in the process to make a difference in your outcomes. Write elizabeth@doingcollege.com; Visit www.doingcollege.com; or Call: 925.385.0562.

Explore the community around campus, have a coffee in town and people watch, especially if students tend to live off-campus at this college.

Even if you think you know what type of school you want, visit a school that is completely different. Looking at mainly large research universities? Visit a smaller liberal arts college. I have seen many students change their perspective when they do this.

Take notes on what you see, whom you meet and what you talk about while you're on campus-several months later, you are not going to remember the specifics, like the name of that interesting professor that your tour guide mentioned, or the surprisingly good meal you enjoyed in the cafeteria.

Take photos and separate them into a college album to help you remember details of your visit.

School visits allow you to experience a campus firsthand rather than just remotely. And visits can help you distinguish yourself as an applicant by giving you the experience (and thus the content) necessary to help you write a truly unique "Why Our College?" essay. These are often the most important essays that will help you show why you and the college are a perfect fit. My college essay workshops each summer provide sample prompts and it is an eye opener to see how specific each college wants you to be about your reasons for applying.

As COVID protocols ease it is a great time to plan college tours. Campus tours are critical to the application process - this is the place where you will be spending a significant amount of your time for the next four years and there is no better way to get a 'feel' for the campus and surrounding area than an in-person visit.

Here are some tips:

If you're a junior in high school and planning to apply this fall, make sure to schedule time to visit the admission's office. Email your regional admissions officer to let them know that you will be planning a visit and would like to introduce yourself. I would discourage a junior student from setting up an interview. If this is your first visit to campus I suggest you enjoy the tour free of the stress of an interview. However, if an on-campus interview is strongly encouraged, as it is at Washington University St. Louis, for example, then I would encourage a junior to prepare with their college advisor and take the opportunity. Otherwise, students should concentrate on digesting what they learn and processing how they feel about the college as the first priority. If the college makes it to your application list, and interviews are available, go for it then and prepare over summer or in the fall.

Think geographically when you plan - you can often visit multiple schools in one week or even a long weekend that are located close together. For example, in Colorado you can visit University of Colorado Boulder, University of Denver, Colorado College, Colorado School of Mines and Colorado State U Fort Collins.

Are there professors or courses you are especially interested in? Reach out to see if you can sit in on a lecture. The same goes for extracurricular activities; perhaps there is a show or a game to watch or a concert to hear. And this has the added benefit of meeting other students who attend the school.

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