

Veritas School's

Guide to College Visits

Visiting colleges is the very best way to know if that school is right for you. All of them can look great on a website, but that is because you're looking through the lens of a professional photographer and seeing only those parts of campus the marketing department wants to reveal to you. One of the colleges we visited looked wonderful on-line, but when we got there, the school was actually located in an area of town that would be similar to Swan Island in Portland – lots of train tracks and manufacturing plants.

A good time to really begin visiting colleges is the summer between your sophomore and junior year. Prior to that, the college-admissions staff doesn't take you quite as seriously as they will when you're closer to actually being able to apply. If you do want to start visiting schools earlier than this, don't spend a great deal of money or go out of your way to make it to specific colleges, as intended majors and thoughts on what you want in a school can change.

The optimal times to visit are on long weekends during the school year when Veritas has days off, but the college doesn't. That way, you can experience campus as it would be when you're a student there, rather than over the summer or on weekends when the college is in "non-class" or remodeling mode. Be sure to check the on-line calendar to see when Dead Week and final exams are, as those would not be good times to visit.

The process of arranging a visitation or tour is critical for you, the student. Parents, please realize that this is the one real opportunity that your child might have to build that critical relationship with and make a positive impression on his/her admissions rep. Don't take that away by wanting to be too involved in the planning. Again, as much as we might want to justify calling or e-mailing by saying our child doesn't have the time, the college needs to know that it is the student who wants to attend there, NOT the parent! :)

Before you go:

- ✓ Go on the college's website to gather information and get a good overview. If possible, do a web tour of the campus and make notes of things you'd like to see. This way, you won't get home afterwards and realize that there was a part of campus you completely missed.

- ✓ Call the admissions department and ask if they have any programs to financially help students visit campus. Sometimes, such as to Calvin College, they will pay a portion of the airfare, as well as provide meals, if you get a certain number of students to travel together (usually three or four with an adult) – or they will cover the student's airfare and put them up for an overnight stay (as at Grand Canyon University).

✓ The student should call the admissions department at least four weeks in advance to sign up for a Visitation Weekend or to schedule a personal visitation time (see below).

✓ If you unexpectedly find yourself traveling to an area where there's a college you'd like to tour, still call and do what you can to arrange a visit, but understand that it may be more difficult for the admissions team to include everything you want to see when they haven't had much notice. Most tours take about 30 to 60 minutes, starting and ending at the admissions office.

✓ When calling, be specific about what you would like to see/do (see notes of possibilities below). Have a list in front of you so you don't have to call back and check things off once you discuss it. Although it might seem easier to e-mail, you will more likely get what you want if the admissions rep is able to personally interact with you.

✓ **Does the college offer interviews? If at all possible, ask to schedule one (optimally after the tour so you have a better feel for their program), even if you're not sure how interested you are in that particular school.** First off, you may end up deciding down the road that it is your #1 choice and then you'll wish you had taken the time to have an interview, and secondly, even if you don't apply there, you get to practice the interview process so that you will hopefully feel more comfortable going into the interview at your top-choice school. Prior to your visits, have your parents ask you questions about yourself that you respond to quickly. This helps you think through what are good and not so good responses. Also, be sure to have recently read a quality book that you either really enjoyed or found very thought provoking, as "Tell me about a book you've just read" often comes up during interviews (Check out "Reading Lists for College-Bound Students," by Doug Estell)

✓ Search the school or town website for listings of area churches. Note those that might interest you. Write down addresses and phone numbers so you can visit a couple of them when you're there.

✓ Get clear directions; ask for travel distances between colleges, if visiting more than one

✓ Pack a notebook in which to take notes and keep handouts/information. Plan on taking photos, especially if you're checking out a number of colleges. This will help you remember what you saw where!

✓ For individual/private tours, the student should call the admissions department several days prior to your arrival and confirm your tour time and schedule.

✓ Plan on taking nice-looking, clean, and modest clothes, such as you might wear to church. Also, take time to brush your hair and teeth before going on campus. First impressions are so important here. I've had comments made to me by admissions

reps about how our students have stood out during campus visits because they made an effort to present themselves well, both in their interactions with others and their appearances.

Should I visit during an official preview event?

- An official recruiting event like Wheaton Connection or Bruin Preview will provide more specific attention and events, but it may not leave you as free to visit exactly the class you want to visit and you may not have the chance to see the campus as it really is on non-visitation weekends. These programs are helpful in the sense that everything is laid out for you; those two days are geared toward visiting high schoolers. There are usually seminars for both students and parents, as well as special activities, such as concerts or movie nights.
- Going on a non-recruiting weekend allows you to spend less directed time at the college. Some college students have told me that they love the preview weekends at their schools because the quality of the cafeteria food goes way up!
- Either way, make sure you visit at a time when students are on campus and regular classes are in session.

What should I do while I'm on campus?

(Take the same list of questions to each college so that you can more objectively compare schools).

- Spend time with someone from the admissions department**
 - What percentage of freshmen return for their sophomore year?
 - Please tell me about the (your intended major) department here.
 - How difficult is it to switch majors?
 - Is it possible to live in a dorm all four years? How much off-campus housing is available?
 - Are the dorms separate for men and women or are they mixed? If mixed, are the bathrooms separate?
 - Ask about safety issues. Are there campus police? What about building security? Are dorm doors locked? Are security personnel available after night classes or late work-study jobs to escort ladies back to their dorms?
 - Are there other major expenses I should be aware of that aren't covered in tuition/housing/books/meal plans?
 - Is it possible to earn scholarships as a student there or are they all awarded to incoming freshmen?
 - What about fraternities and sororities? Are there ways to socialize without joining one?
 - How are roommates selected?

- Is there an Honors program? Please tell me about it. Does it take a separate application?
 - Are there ways that I can volunteer or work on campus as part of a student-leadership group?
 - Are there volunteer/ministry opportunities on campus, such as tutoring children, or ministry opportunities off campus that I can do with other students?
 - If this is a Christian campus, is Chapel offered during the week? Are students required to go? What types of speakers or programs are typical for Chapel? What percentage of students attend?
 - Are there active Christian organizations and Bible studies on campus? If so, does each dorm floor have a Bible study/discipleship group, each dorm, or just one group that meets on campus?
- **If you see a student not rushing to class, ask questions about student life and attitudes?**
- What do students love? What do they not like?
 - Does the school culture make it easy or difficult to be a good student?
 - Do professors teach all the classes or are there TAs? Are the professors accessible?
 - What kinds of things do students typically do after class or off campus?
 - Is it hard or easy to get around without a car, such as to the airport, different kinds of stores (food/school supplies/toiletries/clothing, etc.), a movie theater, or coffee shop?
 - Do most students have bikes here?
 - Do many students go home on the weekends?
- **Spend a night in the dorm (See if there is a Veritas grad with whom you can stay).**
- What is the “culture” like in the dorm? Noisy? Quiet? Studious? Party-ish?
 - Is it hard or easy to be a good student while living in this dorm? Would you always feel like you needed to leave the dorm in order to study without lots of distractions?
 - Ask whether different dorms have different identities. What are they? Explain what you'd prefer (I'm an early-to-bed person; I want to be able to cook; I love social events) and see which dorm other students would recommend for you.
 - Can students pick which dorm to live in?
 - What are the bathrooms like? Typically, some are in the rooms whereas others are at the end of the hall. Are they clean? Do the students have to clean the bathrooms?
- **Set up a one-on-one visit with a professor in the department in which you're thinking of majoring.**
- Ask about the level of academic rigor in the department.

- Ask what students from that department typically find themselves doing after they graduate.
 - Are alumni getting into top-level grad schools? Ask for examples.
 - Be bold and ask the professor's opinions about the equivalent department at the other colleges you're thinking of attending – "Why would you recommend I be a student here rather than there?"
- **Visit classes!**
- This is the most important thing to do while on campus.
 - Definitely visit some classes in the department in which you're thinking of majoring.
 - Try to sit in on the same class in your intended major at each college you visit (eg Calculus or English Lit). This will make it easier to compare schools.
 - Consider visiting a "general education" or required class. If you're going into a science or music major, ask to also visit the labs/practice rooms.
 - Things to notice:
 - Is the class centered around a lecture, discussion, or both?
 - Are students encouraged to participate actively or simply take notes?
 - Before or after a class in your major, ask a student what kind of work the professor assigns and how a grade is determined.
- **If you're interested in playing intercollegiate sports, arrange beforehand to meet with a member of that coaching staff.**
- **If your parents are with you for a preview weekend, they should consider attending a seminar about financial aid or set up a meeting with the admissions/financial-aid office to learn all they can about it at that particular college.**
- **Read a school newspaper; check out bulletin boards to see what types of things are posted.**
- **Eat in the cafeteria. If you have food allergies, look to see what options there are. Arrange to talk with a staff member about your particular needs.**
- **Visit the student union, bookstore, exercise gym. What is the atmosphere?**
- **What is the library like? Are there places for study groups? Tables for private study? Areas for research?**
- **Look at the physical aspects of campus. Are the buildings well maintained? Are there grassy/treed areas in which to relax or study? Are there benches and tables outside? Is there a great deal of litter?**

- Look to see what clubs and activities are available? Do they offer intramural sports?**
- Do the students and staff generally seem "happy?" Would you say for the most part they want to be there?**
- Look around. Notice the student groupings, attire, behavior... Can you see yourself there?**
- Visit several of the churches you researched prior to your visit. Call ahead and ask if the college/career pastor is available to meet with you.**
- Visit the town/surrounding area. What is nearby – stores, restaurants, coffee shops?**

After you return home:

✓ As soon as possible, write down your likes/dislikes in your notebook to help you later when you want to narrow down your college choices. Keep everything on one college in one file folder or tab, so you can then just throw away what you have for those colleges that you decide to eliminate.

✓ If you met with an admissions rep, professor, etc., be sure to send each a handwritten thank-you note soon after returning.

✓ If you really liked a particular school and it's one of your top choices, see if it's possible to visit at a different time of year. If you went on a beautiful spring day, consider going during January. If you went for a preview weekend, try going at a time when there isn't something like that scheduled.

If you're not able to visit many campuses, here are some alternatives to consider:

- Check for a video tour on the website. Also: www.campustours.com or www.ecampustours.com
- Ask Mrs. Jones if any Veritas alums have attended that college. If someone has, she can usually provide you with an e-mail address or Facebook contact so that you can arrange to meet or talk with that person.
- Visit colleges that are nearby or ones that you'll pass on family vacations, etc. Even if you're not really interested in these schools, you'll still get a feel for what types of dorms you prefer, whether you like a college that's in the city or out in the country, etc. This information will help you as you narrow your search.

- Save your travel money to use on visiting your #1 choice. Keep in mind that committing to a four-year college that turns out to not be the school you hoped it would be is a far more expensive endeavor than the travel costs needed to check it out.