

While visiting a college make sure you...

- 1) Talk to several students and a few faculty members. This provides you with a better sample to get a more well-rounded impression of the school. Don't spend your time with just one or two people.
- 2) Eat in the cafeteria. This is where you'll get more answers to more questions. Sit at tables with six to eight students, to ensure that you get a variety of responses.
- 3) Visit the bookstore. This will tell you a lot about the character of the school. Find out if the store sells secondary reading, independent study and general literature in addition to textbooks.
- 4) Visit the student government. The individuals here should have a good pulse on the school.
- 5) Investigate the library and its use.

Questions to ask students and of yourself

- What are the main complaints from people at the school? If people have only good things to say about the school, make sure that those same things are also good for you.
- Are most classes lectures, with everyone madly taking notes to regurgitate on the next exam, or are they discussions? A great deal of work is required of both teacher and student in a discussion class. The teacher must have questions to cover every point he would like to make in a lecture. The student has to be prepared because he's expected to be a participant in the discussion class, not a passive ear.
- Do the students take an active part in the discussion, or is the class lifeless? Don't depend on your observation of one or two classes for the answer to this; ask several students.
- After class, do any students hang around to ask questions or continue the discussion, or does everyone clear out?
- What is the attrition rate? A higher percentage rate of people who stay, and graduate from the school can speak volumes for the school itself. Never assume that a popular college has a high attrition rate, and do not assume that a less popular school has a low retention rate. You can find this information on the college's website or by visiting the registrar's office. It is also a good idea to find out why students stay or leave.
- Does the school have good faculty members across the board, not just in the major you are interested in?

- Are there special opportunities, such as off-campus programs, foreign study, doing research with faculty members or independent study readily available or are they just on paper?
- What are the class sizes, really? The institution may advertise low student-faculty ratio, but don't buy that. Ask particularly about the courses that all or most freshman or sophomores have to take.
- Do faculty make themselves available after class and keep regular office hours, or do they vanish?
- What is the learning atmosphere? Is learning the concern or grades? Is there intense competition for grades?
- Is cheating common, or is there an ethos or an honor code that condemns it?
- Is this a demanding or an easy place? A college may be easy or difficult to get into, but the central consideration is rigor. Find out by asking a few students how many hours a week they study, how many pages they read a night, and what the level of expectation is.
- Is there a variety of campus activities and imported speakers, music and other cultural events?
- Do the students take advantage of these activities?
- Does the school favor anonymity and conformity, or does it encourage identity and individualism?

Questions to ask faculty and administrators

- What happens to graduates? What percentage goes on to graduate and professional school?
- Does the college have a good career counseling office and placement director that works closely with students throughout their college days, not just at the end?
- What has been the graduates' records in getting jobs, what kinds, where and at what salary levels?
- Ask the librarian about the extent of library usage. Are students mainly using it for computer access or are they also reading/checking out books.
- Ask faculty members what they think of students. What are the percentages of students that are interested in learning?

Loren Pope (2007) the author of "Looking Beyond the Ivy League" explains that, "Colleges should be a place of diverse people, views and beliefs. It should be a place where faculty takes an interest in campus programs outside of the classroom. It should be a place of debate, questioning and discussion. It should have a feeling of family or community. When you visit, you are the customer. Any question that is important to you deserves a full and candid answer. If, with a reasonable effort, you don't get it, that's a mark against the school, but the chances are, you'll get more than expected". (Pope, 2007, 144-145).