

# Getting the most out of campus visits

## Advice from a mom who's been there

By HEATHER RICKER-GILBERT

Seven years ago my oldest son applied to eight colleges, only four of which he had ever seen.

I naively rationalized that if he got into some of the unvisited colleges we could always go take a look at them in April.

He ended up being accepted or wait-listed at all eight schools, and we discovered there was no time to travel to faraway colleges in April of his senior year.

He wanted to play in tennis matches, go to the prom and take part in other final rituals, not look at colleges. He ended up choosing one we had actually visited the previous fall.

As summer approaches, many families of high school juniors and seniors will be on the trail to tour prospective colleges.

They are wise to do so. Campus visits give students and their parents a sense of what the culture and life is really like, something they cannot experience looking at a website or reading a college view book.

Since my first child went off to college, I have made numerous campus visits, both as a parent and as an educational consultant.

From what I have learned, you can make your visits as productive as possible by planning ahead and considering these suggestions:

- The student, not a parent, should set up the visit by calling the Admissions Office to make a reservation for a tour and informational session, and to schedule an interview either with an admissions representative or a faculty member in the particular area in which the student may be interested.

Once there, take note whether the admissions presentation is well-planned and presented. Are the tour guides interactive and friendly?

- If possible, schedule your visit when school is in session so you can talk to some students, and possibly sit in on a class. Check out the dining hall and student union. Read the campus newspaper to see what may be the current issues.

Look around. What do students wear and what do their T-shirts say? Do they seem to know one another, are they friendly? What do they say about the social life

on campus, about the food, about their classes? Do students spend the weekends on campus? What is dorm life like? Do they seem like your kind of people?

In a book published by the College Board about campus visits and interviews, Zola Dincin Schneider suggests students and parents find out about what she calls the "three Ds on campus." By this she means the prevailing attitude on "drinking, drugs and dating."

- Check out the state of the buildings. Are they clean and well-kept? Is the grass mowed? What kind of plantings are there? Is there new construction going on and are there some newly completed dorms or classroom buildings? The financial state of an institution is often reflected in these tangible observations.

- Read through the course catalog. What kind and how many courses are offered in the majors your son or daughter may be considering?

How many full-time faculty are listed in the academic departments of interest and is there diversity in their credentials? In other words, have faculty graduated from a variety of institutions?

What are the requirements for certain majors and are there general education courses that everyone needs to take? The college catalog can tell you a great deal about policies and the academics.

In addition, I have come up with some questions you might want to ask to get information that is not necessarily going to be mentioned by a tour guide or in an admissions office presentation:

1. What type of career placement services are provided on this campus? How many and what kind of

companies come in to recruit graduating seniors? What percentage of students get jobs within six months of graduation and how many go on to graduate or professional schools?

2. What is the percentage of full-time faculty members teaching courses as opposed to part-time adjunct faculty?

3. What is the average size of freshman introductory courses?

4. What is the largest lecture class?

5. Are introductory courses taught by graduate students?

6. What kind of "freshman experience" activities or courses are provided for incoming students? Are these opportunities offered to all students across the campus or just in certain colleges?

7. Are there general education requirements that all students need to fulfill?

8. For how many years does the college or university provide on-campus housing? What are the dormitory arrangements: single sex, both sexes on different floors or intermingled on the same floor? What is the ratio



Campus visits give teens and parents a sense of what the culture and life is really like, something they cannot experience looking at a website. Above, students warm up for lacrosse on the campus of Mitchell College, where the athletic program is in its first year under NCAA Div III status. Because it was formerly a junior college, Mitchell used to belong to the NJCAA. Its lacrosse team had its first NCAA Div III win last month.

of residence hall assistants per student?

9. What kinds of academic tutoring and psychological counseling services are provided on this campus? How accessible are health care services and what is covered by tuition fees? Is there a pharmacy on campus?

10. Is there a wireless computer system on campus? What kind of technical support is available to students with computer problems? Is there technical support if the student does not buy his computer from the on-campus bookstore?

11. Does the college offer merit-aid in addition to need-based financial aid? Is it possible to be awarded a scholarship once the student is an upper classman?

12. What percentage of the incoming class is accepted in the early-decision process, as opposed to regular-decision?

13. How much emphasis does the Admissions Office place on SAT scores? Do they require SAT II scores and do they recommend students also take the ACT?

14. Does the school usually have a wait list? How many students are eventual-

ly accepted off the wait list?

These are just a few of the questions you should be prepared to ask when touring colleges and universities with your high school son or daughter. As I have discovered since my first child went off to college, visits are an important part of the admissions process. They can be fun, informative and very beneficial in helping teens make their decisions.

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Students can now register for May Term and Summer Session classes through UConn's College of Continuing Studies.

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May Term runs from May 9-27 at all UConn campuses. It allows UConn and other students to take a class before summer begins, complete a course in just three weeks in May and still have time for all their summer plans.

Students can use May Term to catch up on credits or to lighten their fall courseload.

May Term has almost 100 courses, so students from other colleges can take the class they need and transfer the credits back to their institution.

"May Term is a great way to expedite your degree," said Jeet Joshee, assistant dean and associate professor at the CCS.

UConn also offers flexible six- and three-week Summer Sessions that make it easy for students to balance their education with a job, vacation, or just soaking up the sun. Students can choose from undergraduate credit courses in more than 100 different subjects, with more than 800 sections statewide, including evening courses at several campuses and online

courses offered during the six-week summer sessions.

There are two six-week Summer Sessions at all six campuses, Avery Point, Hartford, Stamford, Storrs, Torrington and Waterbury. The first runs May 31 to July 8; the second July 11 to August 19.

There are two intensive three-week Summer Sessions at several campuses. The first runs June 6 to June 24; the second July 18 to Aug. 5. Housing and meal plans are available at the Storrs campus.

May Term and Summer Sessions classes are held mornings, afternoons or evenings. You don't have to be matriculated at UConn to enroll. The Non-Degree study program allows students to earn academic credits without being formally admitted to a UConn

degree program. Students from other colleges and universities

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