Chapter 4: Campus Visits

Planning the Visit, Questions for your Tour Guide, The Interview, Questions During an Interview, Campus Visit Manners, and The Thank You Note

Visiting and interviewing at college campuses are vital parts of your college search. The better you prepare, and the better informed you are before leaving home, the more useful the results will be to you in clarifying your likes and dislikes.

We ask you to try to visit a few campuses during spring break of your junior year, to get an idea of what different types of colleges are like. However, most of your traveling and almost all your interviewing will take place over the summer prior to your senior year.

Summer visits and interviews are usually arranged by telephone or online during the spring of your junior year. If you plan to apply to Ivy League or other highly selective schools, be aware that their on-campus interview slots fill up very early—contact them early in the spring to reserve a time.

You should also know that while a campus visit is mostly for your information, many colleges expect prospective applicants to make the effort to see the campus if doing so is at all practical. Therefore, visit as many schools as possible, and be sure to give equal attention to a wide range of colleges - not just those on the top of your list.

Today more than ever, the same can be true for interviews, which many colleges interpret as a sign of interest. Colleges that offer interviews expect serious applicants to make the effort to have one, be it on campus or elsewhere. Not interviewing has caused strong Lawrence candidates to be wait-listed rather than admitted in recent years.

**PLANNING THE VISIT**

1. Call or check online for tour times or to reserve a spot on the tour and information session.

2. Many colleges have a formal information session at a specific time of the day. We recommend you attend this as well as do the campus tour.

3. Call ahead to see if the college offers on-campus interviews and try to arrange one (at least 2 weeks in advance). While college admission offices will try to accommodate your needs and requests, it may not always be possible. The earlier you schedule visits, the better your chances of getting the dates and times you prefer. **We recommend interviewing during the summer** since it is often difficult to return to campuses during the fall.

4. Two schools per day. Realistically, you will not learn much if you plan a whirlwind tour. Do not try to visit 22 schools in a week! You are better off visiting fewer schools thoroughly than trying to visit every campus on a 16-college list. A “drive-through” is virtually useless. An interview and tour at two different colleges, along with travel time between them, is almost always enough for one day.
5. If possible, attend some classes and also try to spend some time walking around the campus alone, to taste the flavor of the place. Often, visiting the dining hall and the student center, and listening to students talk, are other good ways to get a sense of the school’s atmosphere. Explore the areas of campus (and the surrounding area) where you think you will spend the most time. Walk around the academic departments that interest you.

6. Take notes! Make it a habit to write down relevant factual information as well as all your personal impressions in a notebook that you keep for this purpose. Careful notes will benefit you in two ways: first, they will help you recall the details of a particular school when you have visited several campuses and they all begin to meld in your head (which they will!); and second, they will prove to be a lifesaver when an interviewer asks you, “Why do you want to attend this school?” or when an application contains a similar question. The “Journal” tab on the Naviance Family Connection is a good place to keep these notes.

7. Even if you are not required to RSVP for a tour or information session, check in with the admission office receptionist when you arrive. You will likely be asked to complete an “Inquiry Card” which officially records your visit. Some colleges consider your campus visit “demonstrated interest.” This piece is more important than you might expect, especially at many smaller, liberal arts schools. All else being equal, some colleges may offer admission to those who have shown the most interest!

8. If you make campus visits during the summer, bear in mind that you can always return in the fall. Colleges offer the opportunity to visit a class, meet with a professor, or have lunch with students. Your mailbox (both electronic and the one next to your driveway) will be full of invitations to fall receptions, visit days, and off-campus interviews. These are great opportunities to learn more about each college and for them to learn about you.

**QUESTIONS FOR YOUR TOUR GUIDE**

Below are some questions you may want to consider asking on the tour. The campus tour is an excellent opportunity to speak with a current student – your tour guide – and get a sense of the college experience from his/her point of view.

1. How large are your classes? How large are freshman classes? Do you meet regularly with an advisor?

2. What has your experience been with the core curriculum or the distribution requirements? Have you been able to explore different academic departments?

3. Where do you study? Is the library a good place to work or study? What hours do students have access to libraries, computers, labs, etc.?

4. Are there appropriate special services available for students with individual needs?

5. What academic experiences are available beyond the classroom?

6. What percent of students live in dorms? Is housing guaranteed for all four years?
7. Is this considered a safe campus? Are there regular patrols, escort vans, emergency phones, etc., if needed?

8. Is this an openly competitive campus? How are tests and exams administered?

9. Do you meet with professors informally? Have you ever been invited to a professor’s home?

10. How tolerant is this community of independence and diversity?

11. What are the most popular extracurricular activities here?

12. What leadership positions in this community do men hold? Women?

13. What do you like best and least about being a student here?


15. Is there an infirmary on campus? How is it staffed? Is there a college physician with an office on campus?

16. Is there a career guidance service on campus? A placement service? Is the placement service available to alumni?

17. What kinds of internships are available for students?

18. Does social life revolve around the campus, or do most students leave on the weekends? What are the major social activities?

19. What is the role of athletics on campus?

20. What is the biggest campus issue currently?

At the end of your visit, ask yourself one very important question:

“Do I see myself fitting in here?”

THE INTERVIEW

Some colleges require an interview, some recommend one, and others leave the matter up to the candidate. In all cases, if the school does offer interviews, it is a good idea to have one. Some institutions may not offer one-on-one interviews, but only group information sessions. If this is the case at one of your schools, schedule yourself for one. You can then plan your campus tour around the information session. Some other advice:

- **Be punctual:** Make sure that you have allowed enough of a time cushion to accommodate missed turns, traffic jams, or foul weather. If, despite your best efforts, you are still going to be
late, call the admission office to inform them of your situation. Assuming you are on time, an
admission officer will probably come out to the waiting room to meet you. Shake hands while
maintaining eye contact. If your parents are with you, you should introduce them clearly by
saying, “This is my mother, Dr. Grant, and my father, Mr. Grant.” They will, in all likelihood, not
be asked to accompany you into the interview. Going by yourself is normal.

• **Relax:** Admission officers are experienced interviewers. They expect some students to be
nervous. Relax. Be yourself. Do not try to show confidence with a false display of nonchalance.
You will probably find, after the first few minutes, that you are quite at home in the presence of
the person who is eager to help you think soundly about your future education. If, afterward, you
do not think the interview went well, you could write the admission officer who interviewed you
and explain why you think it did not go as well as you had hoped. Regardless of how an interview
goes, you must write your interviewer a thank-you note. An e-mail is fine, and it gives the
admission person a chance to respond to you.

• **Be prepared:** Interviews are not only an opportunity for the admission officer to see what you
are like and take your measure, but they are also an excellent way for you to learn more about a
specific school. You should have read the college’s viewbook or visited its website before you go.
Avoid asking for information that is easily attainable in the school’s literature. Try to ask
questions for which there are no straightforward “yes” or “no” answers. As you read a college’s
material, write down any questions to which you cannot find an answer. A favorite question of
college admission officers is, “Why are you interested in attending this college?” While it is a
rather general question, you should have prepared a more specific answer than, “I know of the
school’s reputation for academic excellence.” This statement might be true, but you will need to
strengthen your answer with specifics such as, “I am interested in child psychology, and I know
the department is very strong here.” Try, in a word, to articulate to your interviewer why this
college is a good fit for you. As in classroom discussions, it will be obvious if you are not
prepared.

• **Be yourself:** An interview is a chance for you to showcase who you are and add more personality
to your folder. Dress neatly, but not so out of character that you feel awkward. Do not answer
questions with simple “yes” or “no” responses. It is fine to offer opinions, as detailed and
extended as possible, but, as with dress, they should be in character. Interviewers are likely to
press a line of questioning as far it will possibly go. Thus, if you indicate that your favorite hobby
is building computers, be prepared to talk about that topic in detail. Also, you are not there to
make excuses; you are there to help an admission officer get to know you as a human being.
Colleges understand that none of us is perfect, that we all make mistakes and see the world
differently.

• **Speak your piece:** Interviews provide excellent opportunities for you to present to the school
what type of candidate you are. If any ambiguities or unusual circumstances appear in your
application—one low grade or an unusual number of courses in one department, for example—
this is a good time to clarify them. For instance, if family problems have affected your studies, you
can mention this. You could describe why you moved from an honors section to a regular
section in a course. You can highlight unique interests and achievements, such as involvement in
the IIP. Never be defensive, and by all means avoid a tone of complaint. Let the facts speak for
themselves. You are who you are.
• **Take notes and say thank you**: Never take notes while the interview is in progress, but certainly shortly thereafter, jot down your impressions, ideas, and reactions to the school tour and the interview. If you wait too long, you will recall less. If you take no notes, all the colleges you visit will start to blend together. These immediate reactions often prove invaluable as you ponder your options later on. Include in these notes your interviewer’s name so that you can send a thank-you note upon your arrival home. Do not be afraid to ask him or her for a business card before you leave. You might even want to encourage your parents to take their own set of notes to use as a point of comparison.

• **Alumni interviews**: Many colleges rely on alumni around the country for help in conducting interviews. If you are given the name of a graduate and told to contact that person or to expect that he or she will contact you, do your best to make the connection—two or three honest tries. If, after that, there is still no response, call or e-mail the college’s admission office and explain your situation to them. For alumni interviews, you should follow all the same steps you would for an on-campus interview: be prepared, be yourself, be on time, and remember the interviewer’s name. This person will be passing along his or her impressions of you as a person, and those, as we have said, can be very important.

**QUESTIONS DURING AN INTERVIEW**

Below are sample questions that a college interviewer might ask you:

1. How do you like Lawrence Academy? What has been the most positive experience you have had? The most negative? What would you like to change about Lawrence Academy?

2. What is your role in the school community? What would your teachers say about you as a person? As a student?

3. What is the most significant contribution you have made to your school?

4. What are you looking for in a school? How did you become interested in ____________?

5. What are some of your goals - personal and career - for the future?

6. Tell me about a particular class or assignment in which you found yourself most stimulated intellectually.

7. What is your reason for participating in athletics (or student government, or the newspaper, or the theater, etc.)? What are the satisfactions?

8. Since you are interested in science or math (where appropriate), why are you interested in a liberal arts college rather than a more technical institution?

9. How and in what ways do you expect, plan or hope to transfer your secondary school contributions, achievements, and/or activities to the college level?

10. What has been your favorite subject in high school? Why?
11. What might you study in college?

12. What books or authors have made a lasting impression on your way of thinking? Have you read deeply in any one author or field?


14. What pressures to conform do you feel operating on you at Lawrence Academy? Describe ways in which you “go your own way.”

15. How have you spent your summers?

16. What are your reactions to current events, local, national or international?

17. Describe something about which you have become indignant during the past year.

18. How would you describe yourself as a person?

19. Have you ever thought of not going to college? What would you do?

20. How do you spend your free time?

21. Why do you think you are a good match for this college?

22. Many qualified students apply to our school. What characteristics single you out from others?

23. What should we keep in mind when reading your application? What are you particularly proud of? Any events or grades that you are not proud of? Why?

24. Do you have any questions? (Have some in mind!)

**CAMPUS VISIT MANNERS**

When you visit a school, remember that you are representing both yourself and Lawrence Academy. In other words, act naturally but remember that what you do or say may ultimately impact your standing in the admissions office. You will never understand the complexities of each school’s network, so assume that everyone you meet is in some way connected to the admissions process and treat them with due respect. This means dressing appropriately for your visit and conducting yourself in a positive manner: from your initial handshake, to your undivided attention, to your parting thanks and gracious good-bye. Remember, you have requested to spend time with their staff, so make the most of the opportunity.
THE THANK YOU NOTE

After your visit it is always a good idea to send a thank you note to the person with whom you interviewed. You may meet with more than one admissions representative or come into contact with a professor or department head during your visit. It can never hurt to thank any campus community members that spent time with you. While this note may wind up in your admissions file, at some point along the way, the best reason for doing so reverts to basic rules of courtesy. Especially with the ease of e-mail, a brief note is an effortless way to show your appreciation for an individual’s time.