



COLLEGE
MATCHPOINT

GUIDE TO CAMPUS TOURS

Touring colleges can be a great way to get a feel for what a specific school is like.

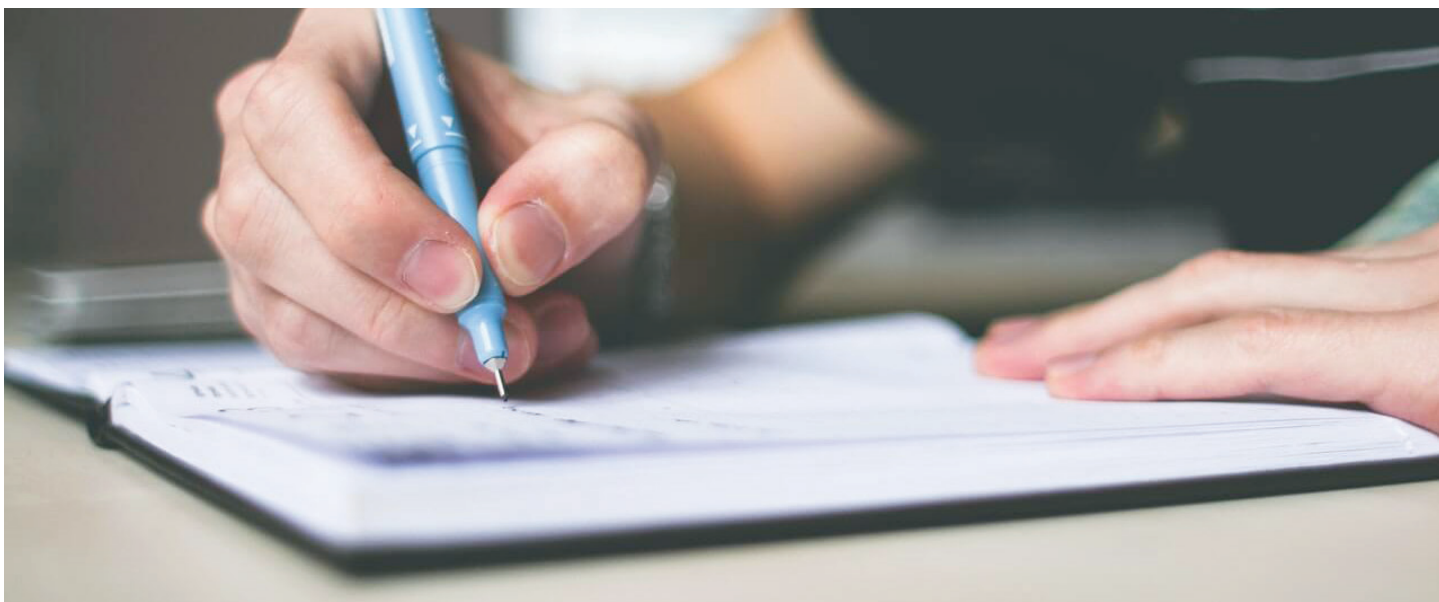


You are about to embark on a wonderful journey with your child: **The College Tour.**

Nerves may be high as you feel the pressure to make this American rite of passage “perfect.” Give that expectation up—your college tour will likely not be perfect. Your student will think the tour guide is dumb or will make a snap decision about the campus after being there for less than five minutes. Or, even more frightening, your student will fall in love with a college that you did not like. Underneath all of this, some pretty tricky dynamics are at work. Your student is ever so slowly moving towards independence and a life away from you. Let’s be honest: that is scary (and sad).

Now for the good news—college tours can be a lot of fun. You get to visit new places and learn about amazing programs. More importantly, you get to spend some quality time with your student. You all will likely look back on these trips years from now with great memories.





WHY YOU SHOULD TOUR

We encourage all our families to do at least one college trip during their decision-making journey. Here's why we think college trips are critical:

- 1 TRYING IT ON:** Guidebooks and websites never compare to the feeling a student gets when they walk through a campus. The experience of spending a morning or afternoon on a campus helps college become real.
- 2 TOO BIG? TOO SMALL? JUST RIGHT?** Preferences on college size tend to follow fads. Right now we are in the era of the big state colleges. Something we often hear is, "I want to go to a college bigger than my high school." However, when students get on the campus of a smaller college they often realize that these institutions are vastly different from their high schools. It is critical for students to see a variety of colleges and universities so that they know their top criteria.
- 3 WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT?:** Talking to students after a college visit provides a wealth of information. You can hear the student's excitement when they share their highlights—whether it be the food, the professors, or even the quality of the gym. This will tell us about some of their priorities in the college search process.

A PARENT PLEDGE FOR CAMPUS TOURS

In order to have a more fruitful trip, I invite you to take **College MatchPoint's College Tour Parent Pledge:**

- I give up the expectation that this trip will be perfect.
- I will remind myself each morning that I have already gone to college and this trip is about finding the best college for my child.
- I will respect my student's point of view and remember that he or she is going to evaluate colleges as a 16-18 year old.
- I will step back and let my student take the lead. (This means not being "that parent" who asks 10 questions on a tour).
- I will ask my student his or her opinion about the college prior to sharing my opinion.
- I will remember that this time is precious and, more than anything, I will work to enjoy this trip.



BUILDING YOUR COLLEGE CHOICE CRITERIA

As you go through the college search, you will hear a lot about finding the right “fit” when it comes to schools. Admissions officers talk about wanting students who will fit on campus, and parents and students often think that schools with the right fit will feel a certain way. Clearly, choosing where you want to go to college is an extremely personal and important decision. But all this talk about making sure that a school is the right fit can also cause a lot of stress!

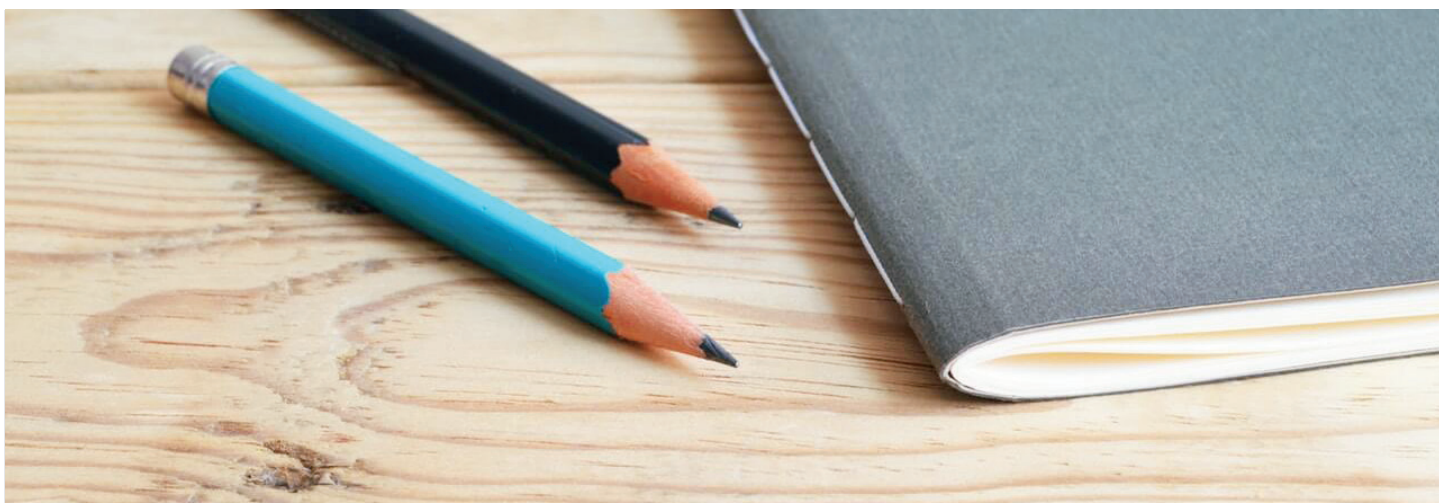
First the good news: there isn't just ONE school that will be a great fit for you. With more than 3,000 schools in the US alone, there will be a number of schools that will offer everything you are looking for in a college experience. To help you focus your campus tours, we recommend that students identify a list of the criteria that matter most when it comes to choosing a college. Creating this list will help you break free from the “best colleges” publications and help create a more personalized “best colleges for me” list of options.

When creating a school criteria list, it's best to choose a narrow (we like 5) set of criteria that are most important. There are no right or wrong answers here—for some of you, an active Greek life is a must; for others, knowing that you won't be paying back loans for eternity is paramount.

TO HELP YOU GET STARTED

Here's a list of common criteria:

- degrees offered
- majors/minors
- location (*rural or urban setting*)
- distance from home
- costs (*tuition, room and board, etc.*)
- size of the student population (*from small at 1,000 to large at 35,000+*)
- campus resources (*labs, libraries, computer access, etc.*)
- financial assistance packages/average debt upon graduation
- athletics
- placement success/internship and co-op programs
- class size
- faculty contact/classes taught by full-time, doctorate-level faculty
- quality/reputation/ranking
- social life (*Greek organizations, sports, school spirit, etc.*)
- religious affiliation/independent
- realistic entry expectations (*based on typical student admitted*)
- retention efforts/student support services
- graduation employment rates (*for students like you*)



COLLEGE TOUR PLANNING CHECKLIST

- ✓ **SCHEDULE A TOUR.** Go online to the Admissions website, and click on the “Visit” tab. This page should tell you the times available for visits. Register (usually online) for a tour and an information session. The information session portion of the college visit is generally led by an admissions staff member, and is a chance to learn about the school’s application and financial aid process. **Two notes:** (1) we don’t recommend seeing more than two colleges in a day and (2) we highly suggest trying to visit some colleges while school is in session.
- ✓ **SCHEDULE INTERVIEW(S).** Most students find 1:1 interviews the most valuable part of any campus tour. Even when classes aren’t in session, some faculty and staff will still be on campus. Find out who’s available for a quick interview during your time there. It’s always useful to schedule the admissions representative for your area of the country.
- ✓ **MAKE A LIST OF WHAT’S IMPORTANT.** Does your student intend to major in English or chemistry? Plan to check out a chem lab or the writing center. Does he or she want to try out for the swim team? Visit the school’s pool facilities.
- ✓ **DO A VIRTUAL PRE-TOUR.** Sites like **Campus Tours** and **ECampusTours** provide a virtual tour of hundreds of colleges or universities. These are not substitutes for an actual college tour, but can highlight campus attractions and help you plan your trip.

PRIORITY #1 ON YOUR COLLEGE TRIP: THE ADMISSIONS OFFICE

It is critical to make a stop at the admissions office of each college that you visit. Be sure to fill out all available forms, as this is how they know that you visited. Why is this so important? Colleges track interest, so you want to make sure they know you were there.

While you are in the admissions office, ask if your rep is in the office. If available, he or she would likely be delighted to meet you. Remember, it is important to let the students take the lead. Admissions officers are becoming increasingly focused on wanting to interact with students rather than parents. This is a great learning opportunity for your student.



WHY YOU SHOULD ADD THESE DESTINATIONS TO YOUR CAMPUS TOUR

To get the most from your time on campus, add these destinations to your list. If you can make an appointment ahead of time when applicable, it's always better.

- **A Class.** Sitting in on a class can lead to valuable information about the school's teaching philosophy and student engagement.
- **The Dining Hall.** Make sure to eat a meal at the dining hall to try out the food options and potentially talk to students in line or at a table. Observing what students do while they eat is informative. Do small groups sit together and talk? So sports teams eat together? Is it mostly students eating alone while working on their laptops or phones?
- **The Career Center.** See if it looks robust and professional. Ask about what unique programs they offer and pick up any brochures or materials so you can refer to it later.
- **The Disability Services Office.** If your student has a specific learning disability and will be using accommodations or support services in college, you should definitely visit this office to make sure it's a place where she'd feel comfortable. Is it in an accessible location that seems friendly and inviting? Is the person at the front desk personable and welcoming? How many staff members are there and what are their backgrounds? Do they offer all the services she will need to be successful academically?





- **The Counseling Office.** Most colleges offer free counseling services that any student can make use of during the school year. Drop by and see what the office is like, how many counselors there are, and what their background is.
- **The Coach's Office.** If your student is an athlete considering playing their sport at the school, reach out to the coach ahead of time and make an appointment.
- **The International Programs Office.** If your student is thinking about going abroad during college, it's a great idea to talk to someone in this office and ask about any programs or countries you know she's interested in visiting. Finding out how easy it is to get credit for non-approved programs could be a good question to ask.
- **The Professor's Office.** Setting up a meeting with a professor in a subject your student is particularly interested in is a great way to get a sense of the academic culture of the school.
- **The Bookstore.** Browse through the books for classes, see what staples the bookstore offers, and of course, use your coupon from Admission (if you got one) to make a purchase so you can gauge how friendly the cashiers are.
- **The Surrounding Community.** Spend some time walking around the town or city where the school is located. Eat in a local restaurant. Have your student imagine herself there for four years. Is it a place where she'd feel comfortable and find plenty to do?

By making all the stops that apply to your student you'll give her a much more complete picture of a college and, if she decides to apply, she'll be able to provide great details as she rocks the supplemental essays that ask "Why X college?"

HOW TO SET UP A CAMPUS TOUR

1. Go to the college's website and click on the Admission tab
2. Go to undergraduate admissions (this will be an option at universities where graduate programs are offered)
3. Click on the Visit or Visiting Campus tab
4. Choose the right option for your visit — i.e. Daily Visit, Weekend Visit (if offered)
5. Check the calendar for an available day that you can attend and click on the day
6. Fill out the required information — name, address, school and graduation year, academic interests, etc.
7. Sign up for everything possible if you have the time, including a class visit, specific majors information sessions, lunch, meeting with a professor or coach (if applicable), etc. (if those options aren't on the form, be sure to call the admissions office to ask if they're available).
8. Hit Submit!
9. Check for a confirmation email. If you don't receive one within 24 hours, make sure to contact the admissions department to check that your request was received.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME ON CAMPUS

TAKE PICTURES AND MAKE NOTES. Details from different colleges can blend together quickly. Did your student have that great talk with the English professor at College X or at University Y? Which school had the beautiful student center and which school had the state-of-the-art engineering buildings? Try to take as many photos as you can, and summarize your notes—your smartphone can be great for this. Most colleges WILL ask you at some point to write about why you want to attend their school—the more specific details you can provide, the better.

CHECK OUT THE FACILITIES. Make sure to see buildings where your student will be spending much of his or her time, including first-year dorms, libraries, and gyms. Also remember to take a look at the student union and other on-campus hangouts.

EAT A SNACK OR A MEAL ON CAMPUS. Observe the students—are they talking to each other? Is the atmosphere lively or quiet?

CHAT WITH A CURRENT STUDENT. Tour guides are usually more than happy to talk about their school but, if possible, try to speak with other students as well.

AFTER YOUR TOUR

TAKE A QUICK DRIVE AROUND THE SURROUNDING AREA. This could be your home for four years—is it someplace you could see yourself living?

STAY IN TOUCH. Ask for an email address from the tour guide or other students your student meets. These contacts will be handy if additional questions pop up.

SAY THANKS. Encourage your student to send a thank-you email to admissions officers, professors, coaches, and anyone else who took the time to chat. A personal touch can often leave a lasting good impression.

EVALUATING YOUR CAMPUS TOUR

Try using our campus tour evaluation scorecard to gain a sense of the schools you tour. We've built this scorecard to utilize the college choice criteria you've developed.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHILE ON CAMPUS

Academics

- How many courses are taught by actual professors and how many by a teaching assistant?
- Is the teaching innovative, discussion- and project-oriented, or is it mostly lecture-oriented?
- How hard do you have to work to get good grades?
- How much help outside of the classroom do you get from professors?
- What type of tutoring program do you have?
- What kind of learning disability resources do you have?
- What opportunities are there for undergraduate research?

Student Life

- What is your most favorite and least favorite thing about this college?
- What is unique about this college? What are your favorite traditions?
- What do students do on weekends? Do they all go home or hang around on campus?
- Do people participate in the activities, groups, and clubs on campus? Or are they dominated by a few groups?
- Do fraternities and sororities dominate the social life?
- How is the quality of food in the cafeteria or dining hall? How are the sizes of the portions? Is it healthy or fast food?



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At College MatchPoint, we believe the college process can be organized, personal, and sometimes even fun. We guide our students and parents through every step of the process. Our one goal throughout the process remains the same: for your student to thrive in their selected college. Yes, this means we want them to love it — academically and socially — and we want it to fit within your family's budget.

Our team includes experienced educational consultants, college admissions specialists, and college essay writing coaches. We are also experts in motivating teens. We get the work done and we make sure that your student's application stands out from the stack.

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LISA BAIN CARLTON, M. ED.

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Lisa Bain Carlton connects students and families to a college that fits. This includes finding a college that matches a student's academic and personal profile as well as the family budget.

Lisa formed Austin, Texas-based College MatchPoint in 2009. She has successfully guided hundreds of students through the college admissions and application process. Considered an expert in placing students with learning differences, she is sought out by families nationwide. In addition, she is adept at helping families find colleges that are affordable.

Lisa earned her Master's degree in Counseling and Student Services with honors from the **University of North Texas**, and a Bachelor's of Business Administration from **Texas A&M University**. Additionally, she obtained a Certificate in College Counseling from the UCLA College Counseling Certification Program. Currently, Lisa is a Professional Member of IECA, the premier professional association for educational consultants. She holds the Learning Disabilities Designation through IECA.



BOB CARLTON

CO-FOUNDER & EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT

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Bob Carlton is a developer of young people. He is equal parts cheerleader and challenger. He loves helping students discover their interests and passions. His vast career experience in both startups and traditional businesses provides our students with real world examples about future job opportunities.

Bob has been traveling to college campuses for over 30 years. He started his career in higher education publishing and has collaborated with hundreds of professors across the country. He is a frequent speaker on higher education including **SXSWedu** and **EDUCAUSE**.



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