

36 Questions to Ask a College

One of the best ways to learn more about colleges is to visit their campuses. When you're on a college campus, slow down and ask a lot of questions.

Ideally, you'll want to talk with more than just the admission staff. Stop a few students during your stay, and ask them what they like and don't like about their school. If you can talk to a professor or two, even better.

To make the most of your college visit, here are 36 questions that you might want to ask:

Academics

1. How much time do students typically spend on homework?
2. How much writing and reading are expected?
3. What is the average class size of introductory classes?
4. How widely used are teaching assistants on your campus?
5. What is the average class size of upper-division courses?

Academic Perks

6. What opportunities are there for undergraduate research?
7. How many students participate in undergraduate research?
8. Is there a culminating senior year experience?
9. Do you have an honors college?
10. Do you have a learning community or other freshman experience?

Financial Aid

11. What is your average financial aid package?
12. What is the typical breakdown of loans versus grants?
13. What percentage of financial need does the school typically meet?
14. What is the average merit award?
15. What percentage of students receive college grants?
16. What is the average college debt that students leave with?
17. What work-study opportunities are there?

Graduation Track Record

18. What is your four-year graduation rate?
19. What is your five-year graduation rate?
20. What does it take to graduate in four years?
21. What percentage of freshmen return for sophomore year?

Academic Support

22. What type of tutoring program do you have?
23. How do you provide academic advice to students?
24. Do you have a writing center and how do I access it?
25. What kind of learning disability resources do you have?

Outside Opportunities

26. How many students at the college get internships?
27. What percentage of students study abroad?
28. What type of career services do you have?

Student Life

29. What kind of dorm choices are there?
30. What percentage of student live on campus?
31. How long are dorm accommodations guaranteed?
32. How many students live on campus?
33. Do most students go home on the weekend?
34. What percentage of the study body belongs to a sorority or fraternity?
35. What activities are offered to students?
36. What clubs do you have on campus?

NINE ALTERNATIVES TO A COLLEGE VISIT

- 1. Get on a college's mailing list.** You can sign up by visiting a college's Web site. It's going to take less than a minute. Just as important, read the materials that you get in the mail.
- 2. Check out a school's financial aid page.** Many colleges will discuss their financial aid policies on their admission pages. Some colleges will post sample financial aid packages that students of various incomes received. Schools will also often include a description of their available merit scholarships somewhere on their admission Web sites.
- 3. Check college blogs.** It's not unusual to find colleges that feature student bloggers on their Web sites. You can learn a lot by checking out what these students are writing about their schools and their lives on campus.
- 4. Spend time on a college's academic Web pages.** Interested in biology? Check out the Web pages of the biology department or any other major that you're interested in at a college. Every academic major at a school should have its own Web home. The site should include the academic credentials of all the faculty and the descriptions of courses. Ideally, the Web home should also tell you whether a department offers opportunities for undergraduate research, senior capstone projects and where students are getting jobs. On some physics department Web pages, for instance, I've seen names of recent graduates and where they are attending grad school or their employers. When visiting an academic Web site, try to get a sense of whether this is a dynamic department that is focused on helping undergraduates.
- 5. Meet with college reps locally.** Just because a school is 2,000 miles away doesn't mean that you can't have a face-to-face chat with an admission rep. Many schools have representatives who live in different geographic areas. As you are developing your college list, check to see if reps for those schools will be in your area. Often these reps will attend college fairs, visit individual high schools, and conduct admission interviews at hotels or other venues.
- 6. Watch videos.** Many schools now post video tours of their campus. You can get a feel for the look of a college or university just by turning on your computer.
- 7. Talk with current students and recent alumni.** Even if you can't visit a school, you should still talk to current students. Contact any school that you are interested in and ask for the names of students or alumni who would be willing to talk about their school.
- 8. Check out a school on Facebook.** A growing number of colleges now have a Facebook presence. You can find out a lot on a school's Facebook page. From my experience, however, students usually don't visit a school's Facebook page until they have already been accepted to the institution.
- 9. Read the campus newspaper.** If you want to know the dirt on a school, spend time reading a university's newspaper. You can often find student newspapers online.