



## *Consultant's Corner*

### The College Visit

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#### *What is the importance of the college visit, and what does it involve?*

The cost of going to college ranges from the price of a new car to that of a new house. You wouldn't buy either without taking a test drive or a house tour. So why would you agree to contract with a college—your child's home for four or more years—without checking it out?

Informal visiting can start at any age. While on vacation, stop at colleges and walk across their campuses. Drive around their neighborhoods to find out about public transportation, shopping, and safety. Talk about the colleges with your child and notice his or her general impressions, likes, and dislikes. When your child takes part in academic or sports competitions on college campuses, use these opportunities to scope them out.

For a gifted young person, participating in a weekend or summer program is an excellent way to look at a college in depth. Not only will your child get to see the campus, but he or she will experience coursework, meet personnel, and see living arrangements firsthand.

For a student on a traditional high school sequence, formal visiting should begin during the junior year. By this time your child will have received massive amounts of printed and Internet mail. Select a small group of colleges and, if possible, visit them. Visiting during your child's junior year and the following summer will make application choices during the fall of the senior year easier.

For a student in an accelerated educational program, visiting should begin when a college decision is a year and a half to two years in the future. These visits and interviews will call for the parent's direct involvement and will require extra research and preparation to determine which colleges and programs will work for the student who is chronologically younger than the traditional college student.

Before visiting, be sure that the college or program is not on break, when it is not possible to sit in on classes. Colleges often schedule visit days or weekends when classes are not in session. During these events the campuses are overrun with other parents and prospective students, and it's hard to get an accurate picture of campus life.

Make appointments for visits. Arrange interviews with the college admissions representative and professors in your child's areas of interest. Although campus tours are beneficial, be aware that they give you the point of view of a single student following a scripted presentation. If your child has a relative or close friend at his or her top pick,

## Advice for Your Child

Prepare for the interview by researching the campus and the department.

Remember that an interview should be a dialogue.

Practice interviewing and ask the

high school guidance counselor or gifted resource teacher for assistance.

Be on time.

Dress neatly, but don't overdress.

Be polite.

Always say thank you.

## Web Resources

National Association for  
College Admissions Counseling  
College Countdown

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*While the opinions of others are important, a college that is the perfect fit for one person may not be for another*

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arrange an overnight in the dorm. This experience gives a prospective student the best feel for his or her possible future home.

For students who are candidates for top scholarships, colleges often will offer special visits that include special interviews, tours, programs, and overnights geared to these students. The student should have visited the campus prior to one of these events, if possible, to have a clear and depressurized view of the college.

Try to spread out the visits. A whirlwind tour gets a lot done fast, but the schools, campuses, and interviews will all blend together, causing exhaustion and confusion to factor into the student's impressions. Also, take notes as you leave each campus and keep track of key personnel at each school. Organization will help when the time comes to remember the details and to pare down the list of colleges to which your child will apply.

For students who cannot visit a campus, virtual tours are often available through college Web sites. Virtual tours can also be used as a first step in research prior to an actual visit.

The earlier information and opinions are gathered, the easier and more well founded the final decision will be. So the first chance you get, hop into your car or onto the Internet and start this amazing journey to college!

—*Jill F. VonGruben*

*Jill F. VonGruben is author of The College Countdown: The Parent's and Student's Survival Kit for the College Admissions Process (McGraw-Hill, 1999) and columnist for "ParentSpace" in the journal Understanding Our Gifted.*

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