



# you can't visit the colleges you're considering

Watching a movie about skiing is far different from actually “schussing” down the slopes—the wind in your face, your fingertips numb with cold. And reading a magazine article about surfing just isn't the same as tasting the ocean spray as your board goes under.

**L**ikewise, just reading about a college or visiting a website isn't nearly as helpful as visiting the campus. Admissions officials agree that the campus visit is really important: *without seeing a college or university, it's difficult to judge the subtleties that could make all the difference in your decision.*

One former admissions dean and consultant puts it this way: “Choosing a college without visiting the campus is like marrying a blind date.” Admissions pros have seen students who walk onto a campus and know immediately and intuitively whether the “fit” is right or wrong. There's just no substitute for the electricity that every campus gives off.

However, it may be impossible—because of distance or cost or family obligations—to visit some or all of the colleges you're interested in. If that's the case with you, there are ways to create for yourself many of the elements of an actual campus visit.

**First and most important**, talk to very recent alumni of the colleges you're considering—in person, if possible, rather than on the phone—as well as to current students. College admissions offices can supply you with names of recent graduates and current students in your area. Also, ask your high school counselor if any graduates from your own high school are attending the colleges

you're considering. Call them and get together with them when they come home for Thanksgiving or Christmas break.

When you talk to former or current students, remember that each will have a different point of view, a different value system, and a different area of interest. *Combine* the various perspectives of the people you speak to and try to get a “feel” for life on campus—and get answers to basic questions like these: Do students find it easy to make friends and get involved? How many hours a day/week do students study? How much time is there for sports and other activities outside of class? Should I bring a TV and microwave? How many bands performed last semester? Should I have a car on campus? Are professors approachable or aloof? Which is more practical: a laptop computer or a desktop? How's the food?

**Second**, ask the admissions office for a DVD, CD, or video that can give you a good feel for the campus. Be sure to visit the college's website, where you almost certainly can take a virtual tour of the campus.

**Third**, ask your high school counselor and your teachers if they have visited the campus. Counselors, who have visited lots of campuses, may be in a good position to judge the “fit.” Why? Because your counselor knows both you *and* the college and can assess how

well the college fits your academic interests and skills.

**Fourth**, ask if a representative of the college is planning a visit to your school—

or your area. It will be worth driving a couple of hours, if necessary, to hear a college representative speak, since you'll get your questions answered and other students may bring up subjects that spark discussion as well.

**Finally**, if cost is the issue, ask if the colleges you're considering sponsor (pay for) group or solo visits—some do!

Your chances of admission won't necessarily be reduced if you can't visit a college you're considering, and—as indicated above—there are lots of ways to get the “feel” of a college or university without actually being there. ■

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