

# Positive Parenting



# TIPS FOR MAKING COLLEGE VISITS WITH YOUR TEEN

Parents of high school juniors everywhere are gearing up to hit the road over spring break to visit colleges of interest to their teenagers. While families can get a tremendous amount of valuable college information online, even in today's Internet age, there's no substitute for an in-person visit to get a true feel for an institution, its campus and its students.

Organizing a college tour road trip can be a daunting task for parents. Which schools should be visited? How many schools? How do you make the most out of a campus tour? Richard E. Bavaria, Ph.D., senior vice president of education outreach for Sylvan Learning, "schools" parents and high school students in his "College Visits 101," top ten tips for organizing a spring break college road trip that parents and students alike will give an A for information-gathering and fun.

**1. Start by Casting a Wide Net** - If you and your teenager haven't already done so, start by putting together a big list of potential schools of interest – up to 20 schools – for further investigation and research. Carefully consider a wide range of selection criteria, such as, geographic location, rural/suburban/urban campus setting, size of student enrollment, religious affiliation, academic strengths and offerings, and athletic programs, among others. Include a range of "dream," "target" (strong odds of acceptance based on your teen's test scores, GPA, etc.) and "safety" schools.

**2. Finalize Your Target Tour List** - Once you have your initial pool of possible school targets, narrow that list to a more realistic number of schools to visit – schools that meet the criteria for your teen and your family. Fine tuning your list can largely be done by visiting schools' Web sites, reviewing college guides from the library or bookstore and, of course, by working with your teen's school guidance counselor. Other students, friends and family members can also offer invaluable insights.

**3. Get SAT/ACT Test Prep Support** - If you take a school off of your teen's final target list because his or her SAT or ACT test scores aren't in that school's typical accepted student range – or you're afraid they won't be – consider obtaining SAT/ACT test prep support from your local Sylvan

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([http://tutoring.sylvanlearning.com/SAT\\_ACT\\_test\\_prep\\_programs.cfm](http://tutoring.sylvanlearning.com/SAT_ACT_test_prep_programs.cfm) ).

With student application submissions hitting record highs – and acceptance rates at historic lows at many schools around the country – competition to get into the “top” colleges is more difficult than ever before. Sylvan’s college prep experts will tailor a personalized plan that builds the skills, habits and attitudes to your teenager’s needs in order to score higher on test day and apply to college with confidence. Sylvan’s highly personalized and targeted approach focuses on the exact skills needed to successfully answer test questions. For many students, skills can be mastered to raise test scores in as little as five to twelve weeks.

**4. Visit While College is in Session** - Every family’s final “visit” list of schools is different; some travel to 12 or more campuses while others only a handful. Based on the geography of your target tour list, you may in fact wind up making a few road trips – perhaps one over spring break and then one or two long weekend treks. Regardless of how many campuses you visit, make sure to schedule your visits while college is in session and students are attending classes. Don’t visit during midterms or finals and avoid weekend visits if at all possible, since classes are seldom held then. Be sure to call ahead and check on tour times, dates offices are closed, and visit/interview policies. If spring proves problematic because your target schools have spring break the same week your teen does, fall of senior year is also an ideal time to visit.

**5. Remember the 2/2/2 Rule** - Two schools a day. Don’t try to visit more than two schools a day, especially if the schools aren’t close together. Any more than that and you’ll never have enough time to really get a fair sense of the school, which after all, is the entire point of taking the road trip.

Two question limit. Given that most teens find their parents embarrassing under any circumstances, they are especially sensitive to mom or dad asking numerous questions on the campus tour. Try to limit your questions to two vital topics. For example, focus on safety and financial aid.

Speak with at least two professors or students from your teen’s intended major. Now is your -and your teenager’s – time to determine if this learning

environment is right for your family. Ask a student, “What is the quality of faculty advising? Which outstanding professors or courses does he/she recommend for that specific major?” Speak to a professor about general education requirements, which classes are most popular and fill up quickly, and which classes should be completed in the first year.

**6. Schedule Smart** - Be sure to make long trips efficient by planning several visits along the route. Figure out driving distances between schools so you and your teenager can determine which schools to visit on the same day. When you have a tentative itinerary, you and your child can begin calling colleges to schedule the visits. Be sure to reserve in advance for official campus tours, and/or interviews with the admissions office, coaches, or professors. Make your appointment calls at least two weeks in advance of your target visit date.

**7. Ask Questions to Make the Most of Your Visit** - Encourage your teen to ask as many questions as possible – and ask different people the same questions to see if you get different answers. In addition to the official tour guide, speak with students, professors, librarians, or other representatives based on topics of interest to your student.

**8. Go Beyond the Official Campus Tour to Get the “Inside Skinny”** - Official campus tours are almost always 30-60 minute student-led affairs that give a good overview of the college, its facilities, academic offerings and student life. They’re a good place to start, but by doing a little advanced homework, your family can round out your visit with other campus experiences that can help you and your teen get the “inside skinny” on the school. If any family members, friends, or recent graduates of your teen’s school are enrolled, have coffee or meet with him or her. If your teen is an athlete, musician, artist, or has another special interest, call in advance to arrange a meeting with the coach or other relevant faculty members.

**9. Eat on Campus** - What teenager doesn’t place a high priority on food? Most schools allow visitors to eat on campus; so eat in the dining hall or

other on-campus eating establishments to give your teen a firsthand “taste” of the school’s food while also saving money. Likewise, if you need overnight lodging, consider allowing your teenager to stay in a dorm. Even if you don’t know a student with whom your child can stay, many schools will arrange for your teen to stay overnight with a current student – if you call in advance. Parents will save money by only paying for one hotel room (or booking a smaller room) and the prospective student will gain an invaluable chance to experience dorm life.

**10. Create a Photo Diary** - Believe it or not, once your family arrives home from your college tour road trip, all those campuses may start to blur together – especially if you visit numerous schools. Use your digital camera to take a lot of photos -even videos – during your visits to create a record of each school. Your first photo of each school should show the college name on a sign or building to ensure you remember which school you visited. You and your teen can create an online folder for each school or print out the photos and keep them in folders with the other informational material you’ll pick up on your visits.