



Should you really visit colleges?

By Kevin McMullin, Collegewise Founder and President

Most families who are college searching have heard the advice about visiting schools. It makes sense. It's hard for students to commit to spending four years someplace they've never even seen in person. But much of the advice surrounding college visits is difficult to follow, especially if students don't have the resources to spend on substantial travel.

For example:

You should visit colleges. There's just no substitute for actually being there.

Fair enough. But easier said than done, especially if the student is applying to schools that require significant travel to get there. That time and expense adds up fast. And what if a student is applying to 8 or 10 or 12 colleges? Do you really need to book that many trips to be a responsible college searcher?

Don't visit during the summer—nobody will be on campus. Visit when school is in session so you can fully experience it.

Good advice in theory. Hard to pull off in practice. "Get good grades in challenging courses" is college prep 101 advice. Now students are supposed to take time off from their own schooling to visit colleges?

Demonstrating interest is important to getting in. That's why you have to visit!

True for some schools, but even for those, it really only applies to students who live close by and can visit at little to no expense. I've never heard of a college that would penalize an applicant for electing not to incur expensive travel expenses to visit a school they haven't even been admitted to yet.



Take the tour, sit in on a class, talk to students, tour the local area, meet with an admissions officer, tour the dorms, etc., etc., etc.

I've worked with plenty of engaged students at Collegewise. But I've never met one who wanted to turn a college visit into a combination of a homework assignment and boot camp. And even a seasoned adult can only hear so many spiels about school history and how many volumes are in the library before their eyes glaze over.

So, what's the smart, responsible approach to college visits that won't necessarily break the bank? There's no one right way, but here are a few resources.

Here are two past posts, this one with a basic tip, this one with five.

Here's a recent New York Times article arguing for skipping the visit. Each family should make their own decisions, but I'm including it for any readers who may be feeling like the visits just aren't worth it.

Want more expert admissions tips from Kevin? Check out his blog at wiselikeus.com.

