

"Test Drive, Look Under the Hood Before Selecting Your College—The College Visit"

If you are a high school student thinking about going on to college, you're approaching an important decision-making time. What college will you attend? Where will you invest the next four years of your life—and a substantial number of dollars?

Your chances of making the right decision will increase with the amount of time and effort you put into the selection process. Just as you test drive a car and look under its hood before making a decision on whether to buy it, you should "test drive" any college or university you are considering and look under its "hood."

This means visiting the campus and spending enough time there to see how it rates in the categories that are important to you as a student and as a person. After you visit, you need to ask yourself how you felt on the campus. Were you comfortable or did you feel out of place? Does the college seem to have a strong program in the areas of interest to you? Is it a place where you can develop as a person? If you can give positive responses to those questions, chances are that you're looking at a good match.

Many students start visiting campuses during the junior year of high school, often through special programs sponsored by the college, such as open houses, conferences or athletic, cultural or other activities. Such visits can give valuable first impressions.

Quite often, families plan a vacation between the junior and senior year of high school to enable the student to visit a number of colleges that might be under consideration. Summer visits allow prospective students to see the campus and buildings and to meet with the admissions staff. The opportunity to talk with faculty members and students and to attend a class or two is limited, however, by the extent of that college or university's summer program. Quite often, what is going on during the summer doesn't accurately reflect what occurs during the rest of the year at a particular college.

For example, at many colleges the student body is older during the summer, because a number of teachers and other professionals have returned to work on advanced degrees. And the other people you'll see on the campus are likely to include youngsters participating in various activity camps and people attending conferences the college is merely providing facilities for.

Since a college really is people rather than buildings, it's valuable to visit when those who teach, learn and work there during the academic year are present.

If possible, then, plan your visit during the normal school year when the college is in session. It is best to schedule your visit during the week rather than on Saturday and Sunday. Weekends tend to have the same disadvantages as summers. It is also a good idea to avoid the last week of a semester when students and faculty are likely to be tied up with final exams.

Now that you know when to visit, you may be wondering how to go about it. If possible, make an appointment in advance. If there is no opportunity to do this, be flexible with the arrangements that can be made at the last minute. Don't be too demanding. Remember that staff, faculty and students have time commitments they have to meet.

Try to allow more than a couple of hours for your visit. Schedule at least a full morning or afternoon. Remember, this is your test drive. You want

to know what kind of performance you can expect when you make your college choice.

Plan to schedule your appointment by phone or letter at least a week in advance. That will give the admissions office sufficient time to make the best arrangements for you, particularly if you would like to stay overnight on campus.

All of the Pacific Northwest Independent Colleges welcome the opportunity to host students. Some colleges have guest rooms, while others will arrange to have students share their rooms with visitors. There is usually no charge to the student guest, except perhaps for meals in the dining hall and admission for special events the visitor may want to attend.

If you are interested in activities, such as music, theatre or athletics, indicate, when making your arrangement, that you would like to meet with an activity director or coach. Ask if it would be possible to visit with a faculty member and to attend a class or two.

Find out in advance how to get to the campus. If you will be traveling by public transportation, ask whether the college provides a service of meeting students at airports, train stations and bus depots.

If you are driving, either alone or with your family, you might want to arrive about an hour before your appointment with the office of admissions. This will give you an opportunity to wander around campus on your own, examine the bookstore, have a soft drink in the student center and maybe strike up a conversation with students and get their impressions of the college.

Take the time to examine bulletin boards around the campus. The pulse of the college or university often is reflected in the announcements and posters on those bulletin boards. Also, spend a little time in the library to see how the students make use of it.

When you meet with the admissions staff, faculty and students, ask questions. If you want some information, don't hesitate to ask. It's in the college's best interest, as well as in yours, that you are well informed when you make your decision.

Be observant while you are on the campus. Look at how the students are dressed and what they have in their dormitory rooms. Notice how the students get from place to place. Do they walk? Drive? Bicycle? Does this lifestyle fit in with yours?

After you've seen it all and talked to the right people, it's time for you to consider your reaction to the college as a whole. Is it the place you want to spend the next four years?

That's still a tough question, but if you've given careful attention to your test drive and looked closely under the hood, you're in a good position to come up with the right answer.

(For additional information about how to visit a campus, ask your counselor for the new College Board publication, "Campus Visits and College Interviews" by Zola Diricin Schneider.)

Thomas Meicho
Dean of Admissions
Linfield College
McMinnville, Oregon 97128



Judge Loretta Biggs, 30, exemplifies the success level of EBONY's selection of 30 Leaders of the Future.

30 Black Leaders of the Future

Black Americans under age 30 show that age is no barrier as they make impressive marks in their careers and communities to become tomorrow's Black leaders, according to the June EBONY.

Among the doctors, lawyers, attorneys, company founders and government officials profiled are: Loretta Biggs, 30, North Carolina's first Black female judge appointed to the U.S. District Court; 29-year-old Graham C. Grady, an attorney named by Chicago Mayor Harold Washington to head the Private Industry Council of Chicago; Newark, New Jersey's Lorna K. Johnson, 28, who is an attorney and the only woman heading one of the 111 affiliates of the Urban League; and 26-year-old William L. Walker Jr., the youngest member elected to the Arkansas House of Representatives.



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