EAB

Campus Visit Fact Sheets

Answers to Common Questions About School Selection and Campus Visit Design

Enrollment Management Forum

Project Director

Sarah Stricker

Contributing Consultants

Jane Alexander
Molly O'Connor

Practice Manager

Keith O'Brien

Managing Director

Carla Hickman

About EAB

EAB is a best practices firm that uses a combination of research, technology, and data-enabled services to improve the performance of more than 1,300 educational organizations. EAB forges and finds the best new ideas and proven practices from its network of thousands of leaders and then customizes and hardwires them into every level of member organizations, creating enduring value. For more information, visit eab.com.

About the Enrollment Management Forum's Marketing and Recruiting Effectiveness Center (MREC)

MREC is EAB's new research resource for enrollment teams, supporting strategic decision-making and targeted improvement efforts in marketing and recruiting. Our research team continually evaluates existing and emerging ideas and pinpoints those that are the most viable.

MREC shares new findings each quarter through a suite of deliverables, including:

• Short research briefs and white papers

• Live webinars

• Expert takes on emerging issues

• Decision-making tools and discussion guides

What Factors Matter Most in School Selection?

Prospective students' minds may seem like black boxes, but there is clear evidence that a few core factors matter when they make a final decision. Understand what areas are the most influential to students, and shape your campus visit messaging based on these factors.

Top Reasons for Choosing *Another* Institution

Campus environment	**14%**
Academic reputation	**13%**
Cost of attendance	**12%**

This top factor that determines whether a student feels the school is the "right fit" can only be experienced by visiting the campus.

These concerns can be addressed by thoughtful institutional messaging during visit, but should not be the main focus.
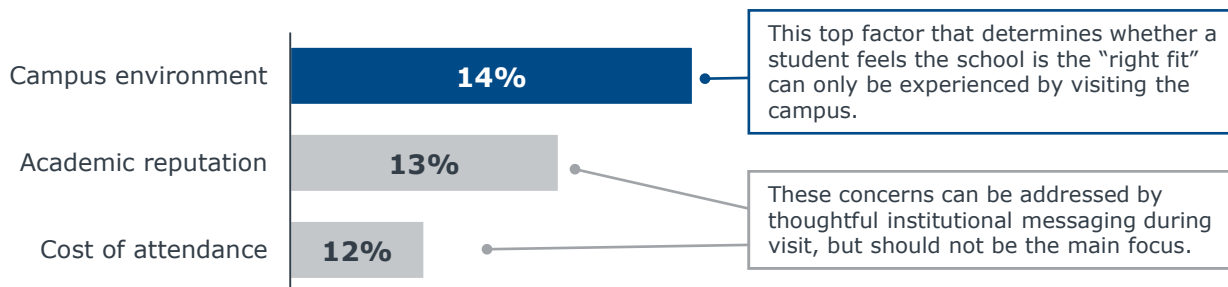
Campus Visit Insights from Online Discussion

It also matters what visitors are saying about campus visits themselves. In an analysis of 77 online discussion comments about good and bad campus visits, we uncovered some of the common drivers for enjoying—and not enjoying—a campus visit. In order of importance:

Reasons Students Disliked a Campus Visit

- Bad or ineffective tour guide
- Campus facilities issues
- Poor staff or faculty interaction
- Unwelcoming campus environment or culture

Reasons Students Liked a Campus Visit

- Welcoming campus environment or culture
- Good, personable tour guide
- Liked the location of the school
- Great campus facilities and amenities

The School Also Needs to "Feel Right"

One often overlooked factor is that students need to be able to see themselves on campus—the experience of visiting needs to inspire them to picture a future there.

Self-Check: Do You Address These Top Factors?

- ☐ Our tour guides go through training in both school knowledge and people management.
- ☐ Faculty involved in campus visits and events are thoughtfully matched with prospects.
- ☐ Info session or financial aid panel discusses cost and ways to afford the college.
- ☐ Visitors to campus will see both students and faculty who reflect their own identities.

- ☐ The admissions team has a relationship with the campus facilities and maintenance teams.
- ☐ Every staff member on campus knows how to greet a visitor in a welcoming way.
- ☐ Academic reputation is demonstrated through more than just ranking data.
- ☐ The campus visit emphasizes what there is to see and do in the school's local area.

Source: "Beyond the Campus Tour: College Choice and the Campus Visit," Okerson (2016); EAB Enrollment Services Deposit IQ (2017); EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

When Should We Aim to Get Students on Campus?

There are certainly merits to getting students on your campus as early as possible—increased brand awareness and creating a regional pipeline of students chief among them—but when it comes down to post-decision analysis, it is clear that visiting a campus later in the decision-making process is ultimately more beneficial to the student and a better indicator of a student's likelihood to yield.

Some Students Begin Their Search *Very* Early, But Most Still Wait

Legend:
- Pre-freshman
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Chart values: 11%, 8%, 18%, 43%, 20%

Students continue to start their college search earlier, and many schools need to evaluate whether getting students on campus earlier impacts yield.

The majority of students (63%) still considers the junior and/or senior years as the beginning of their search.
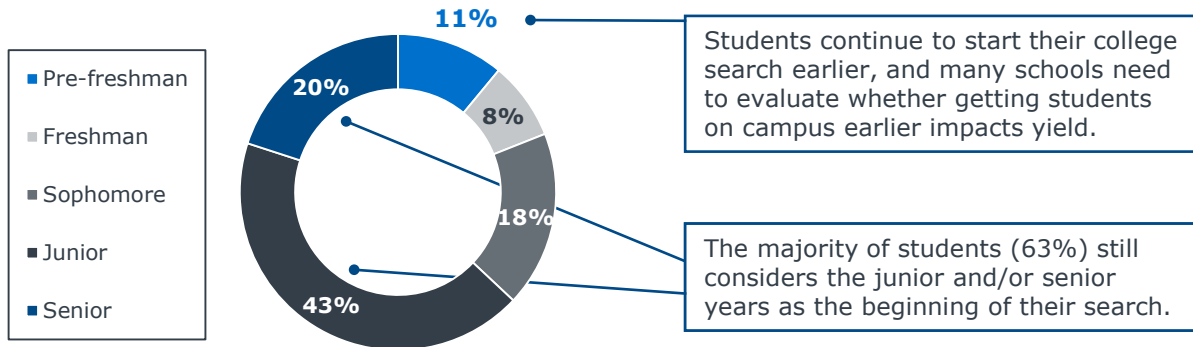
The Campus Visit Remains Most Useful During the Senior Year

The later students are in their high school careers, the more likely they are to view the campus visit as a helpful source of information.

Something to Watch:

In single-institution analyses, there is even evidence that of the seniors who visit, those who come closer to deposit day yield at a higher rate.

Bar chart values: 42.2%, 33.0%, 49.6%

Percentage Reporting the Campus Visit as a Helpful Source of Information

- All
- Juniors
- Seniors

EAB Campus Visit Timing Recommendations

- Begin to **consistently** invite students to visit when they are rising juniors, and continue this message for the rest of the time they remain in your funnel.
- Focus your strongest efforts on those students who report getting **the most use out of a visit**—your junior and senior prospects.
- Study your own yield rates for visitors and determine if **visits later in the cycle** (i.e., between January 1 and May 1) yield at higher rates than earlier visits. If this anecdotal trend is present on your campus, your visit invitation strategy should reflect this.

What Are Other Schools Doing for Campus Visits?

The Essential Model

This model is the starting point for any talk about innovating on-campus visits. It is the most prolific, with 84% of schools' general visits[1] using one of the following structures:

Information Session	Campus Tour

Campus Tour	Information Session

What This Model Does Well
- Touches on the core visitor expectations
- Provides a reliable framework for visit

Drawbacks of This Model
- Difficult to differentiate between schools
- Commits visitors to two long activities

The Modified Essential Model

Rethinking the tour structure:

Tour (Theme 1)	Information Session	Tour (Theme 2)

Rethinking the information session:

Traditional 60-min Information Session

Rotating Small Group Discussion Panels

Student Life	Financial Aid	How to Apply	Q&A
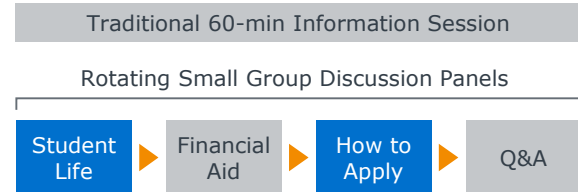
What This Model Does Well
- Breaks up the monotony of info sessions
- Innovates on the standard visit model

Drawbacks of This Model
- Creates more timing and logistics for staff
- Requires more staff to host tours or panels

A Conference-Style Model

	Info	Tour	Special
9am	General Info	Walking Tour	Dorm Tour
11am	STEM Info	Walking Tour	Dorm Tour
1pm	General Info	Walking Tour	Financial Aid

What This Model Does Well
- Provides a way to mass-customize visits
- Still incorporates the essential elements

Drawbacks of This Model
- Suited for large visits/events (i.e., open houses)
- Requires significantly more scheduling

A Completely Personalized Model

We are so happy you're here today. Based on our conversations with you, we have arranged the following itinerary for your day:

9:30am	Roundtable talk (admissions)
11:30am	Science-focused academic life tour
12:30pm	Lunch with Dr. King (biology)
2:00pm	Student shadow with Mindy

Optional: Coffee with the Dean at 10:45am

What This Model Does Well
- Fully personalizes the campus visit experience
- Provides only the elements the prospect wants

Drawbacks of This Model
- Resource-intensive from scheduling to day of
- More realistic for lower volumes of visitors

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1) EAB data collection of 223 institutions' campus visit practices.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

What Are Other Schools Doing for Niche Groups?

Increasingly, institutions are creating unique offerings based on the groups that are not well-served by their basic tour days. If that group is large enough, create a tailored program that will bring those students to your campus in the fall. If you find it difficult to identify groups, current students can weigh in on the particular challenges they may have faced in enrolling as members of these various groups, so use your student team's experiences to help inform new programs.

If Standard Hours Don't Work…

Sunset Tours can show off the campus in a literal new light. Plus, these tours are offered later in the day, opening campus to visitors who can't come during normal hours (such as those who work or would have to make a long journey to attend a morning tour).

Also consider weekend or spring break tours.

If You Have Specialized Groups…

Dedicated info days such as **Homeschool Day** or **First-Generation Student Day** can build on the logic of classic days such as Transfer Days. Recruit attendees by sharing with relevant community groups. If identifying special groups is hard, ask current students for recommendations.

These can be offered multiple times if needed.

If You Can Offer Constructive Sessions for the Community…

Create **workshop events** to get students on campus to achieve other goals and let them visit as a side benefit rather than a main attraction. **College planning days** and **portfolio workshops** are popular. Students value hearing directly from you, and these events help win over parents.

Engage high school counselors in outreach.

If There Are Language Barriers…

In markets where student or their parents are not comfortable learning about the university in English, there has been a push to offer **language days** to support these communities. These work best if staff and students are not only fluent but also culturally aware of different needs.

Expand this to international virtual events.

If International Prospects Are Hard to Reach…

Engaging groups of students can happen off campus entirely. For international students, engaging through their main apps—such as **WeChat sessions** for Chinese students or **WhatsApp sessions** with Latin American students—can help bridge the distance and meet their needs.

Be mindful of firewall and data limitations.

If You Have Yield Loss Points…

Create days that recapture the interest of prospective students before they melt. Depending on the point in the enrollment funnel that you have challenges, these could be anything from early **application decision days** in late fall to activity-themed **summer orientation events**.

Use these to proactively answer questions.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

How Do We Ensure Our Campus Is Accessible to All?

As strategic enrollment goals continue to push for increased diversity of many kinds—high-achieving, first-generation, underrepresented demographics, international—many enrollment managers find it challenging to get these interest groups onto the campus itself. Addressing the cost or travel barriers requires careful design because the best practices require dedication of resources in order to make noticeable impacts in enrollment.

Two Strategies for Increasing Campus Visit Access

Fund Their Travel

▶ Campus Visit Stipends

- Dedicate a set amount of money to pay toward a student's visit, usually once they have been accepted.
- These can be tied to an application process or a special student status, but usually they are broadly offered.

▶ Strategic Visit Programs

- Engage a target group by creating a financial incentive (low cost or free travel) to visit campus.
- Dedicate travel funds to students who would otherwise not be able to visit.

Engage Virtually

▶ Virtual Tours

- Most schools have virtual tours online, so it is quickly becoming an expectation in the market.
- The easiest-to-implement solution is to hire a vendor, though this means most virtual tours look alike.

▶ Live-Cast Events

- Online events leveraging social media offer much greater convenience and facilitate interaction and discussion.
- The large reach of internet events and the ability to quickly follow emerging trends in questions are unparalleled.

Travel Program Ideas

Bus-In Programs

Great for building partnerships with regional schools

Fly-In Programs

Can take some of the huge expense out of visiting

Travel Tuition Waivers

Incentivize visitors to later enroll by giving them a fall tuition discount

High-Touch Visit Days

Free, application-only visit offering college prep advice and mentoring

Live-Cast Event Toolbox

1. Select which of the above tools to use for a live-cast event.
2. Determine a targeted group of prospects and invite them early and often.
3. During the event, make sure there are at least two people presenting to maximize their responses to emerging questions and topics.
4. Record the live-cast event so it can live online as a resource for those who missed it.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

Advisors to Our Work

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