



# A GUIDE TO HELP YOUR FAMILY GET THE MOST OUT OF A COLLEGE VISIT

We want your student to be successful no matter which college they choose, and here at Illinois Wesleyan University, that means helping them find their perfect fit, even if that isn't on our campus.

Visiting a college can be one of the key factors in a student's decision making process. To help you and your student make the most of each visit, we've created a list of questions we hope will be helpful — things to consider BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER a campus visit — to help your student discover their best fit school!

## STEP 1 - Things to consider BEFORE visiting a campus:

**Would my student prefer to be known by faculty and staff or are they happier flying under the radar?**

Both are valid and may inform you of the size of the institution that best fits your student's needs.

**Does the school have a solid placement rate for its graduates into careers and graduate programs?**

**How many first-year students return for their sophomore year?**

This statistic, referred to as "retention," speaks loudly about the culture of a campus and how satisfied its students are.

**What is the graduation rate?**

(Often measured over a 6 or 8 year period, this is a stat you can compare on <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>.) Sometimes it's even more helpful to ask "what percentage of an institution's yearly graduates do so in 4 years?" It's a subtle difference, but one that gives an accurate picture of an institution's success.)

**What percentage of graduates from an institution default on their student loans?**

This is a strong indicator of how successful graduates are in the real world post graduation.

**Will it be possible to meet a faculty member during our visit — one that teaches in an area my student is interested in?**

With advance notice most schools will work hard to make that happen.

**Would it be possible for my student to sit in on a class?**

If classes are in session, many universities will arrange for a student to sit in on a class. It's certainly worth inquiring about when setting up a college visit.

**Does your student have a particular area of interest that could be explored in a bit more depth?**

Reach out ahead of time. Again, with advanced notice, many schools will do their best to include meetings with faculty, coaches, and staff during your visit.

## STEP 2 - Questions to Ask/Things to consider DURING a campus visit:

When visiting multiple colleges, various amenities, buildings, and campuses tend to blend together. *"Was that the college that had the residence halls with the circular stairs?" "Was that the school that offered free public transportation?"* During your visit, start by snapping a photo of a university sign. Then take pics along the way that will jog your memory. As there are breaks between conversations, jot down your thoughts about what you've heard and seen. You'll be surprised how much these notes and photos might help if, in the end, the decision between two colleges is close.

**Here are some ideas for you and your student to take mental notes of:**

How do I feel walking around campus?

Is there a vibe to this place and do I like it?

Can I see my student/me thriving here?

Can I see them/myself finding the right balance of having meaningful social experiences and succeeding academically?

Can I tell safety is a priority?

Do the people I'm meeting and seeing seem authentic?

**Here are some questions you might consider asking if they aren't addressed along the way.**

### **CAMPUS:**

**How does the college live out its commitment to student and campus safety?**

**Are there health and medical services available on campus, and nearby emergency care should the need arise?**

**Are there mental health services available? Does it cost a student to use them?**

**Where will my student reside? What housing options do they have? Are there affinity/themed halls/floors available?**

**If my student has dietary restrictions can they be accommodated by campus dining services?**

**Does the school invest in its facilities and equipment — not just residence halls, but in the academic infrastructure?**

Where an institution places its resources is a clear sign of what they value.

**Is there a social sorority/fraternity system? If so, what percentage of students participate?**

**Is there a residency requirement? Do fraternity and sorority houses count as on-campus living?**

**Does a student need a car, and if so, does it cost to park on campus?**

**Is there public transportation available for my student to access the community?**

### **ACADEMICS:**

**If a student is undecided about what they want to major in, is it likely that they can still graduate in 4 years?**

**If a student has varied and diverse interests, how likely is it they will be able to pursue a variety of experiences?**

(e.g. play a sport AND play an instrument, pursue multiple majors and/or minors, study abroad AND take part in internships, etc.)

**Will professors be the ones teaching courses or will graduate assistants carry out the bulk of instruction?**

**How accessible are professors to their students that have questions or need support?**

**If my student learns differently (i.e. needs an IEP), will they be supported here?**

**What percentage of faculty have their terminal degrees (highest degree awarded in their fields)?**

### **CAREER & GRADUATE SCHOOL PREPARATION:**

**What types of career counseling services are available? Are there resources for helping students with resumé preparation, preparing for job interviews, connecting them to internships, job opportunities, and successful alumni in a similar field?**

**What types of experiences does the college offer to make certain its graduates stand out to prospective employers and graduate schools? Is there a focus on taking the theoretical and making it real?**

We know employers often look for problem solvers who have varied backgrounds and a range of experiences in the real world, even during college.

**In addition to a diploma, will a student graduate with something to point to, talk about, or show prospective employers — something tangible that demonstrates understanding and experience outside the classroom?**

### **GENERAL:**

**Is there someone specific you can go back to with questions after you leave?**

This will likely be your student's admissions counselor but could also include a coach or someone in the financial aid office.

**Is there an application fee? Is there a deadline to apply? Are there advantages to applying early?**

## STEP 3 - Things to do AFTER a campus visit:

First and foremost, realize that no college or university is perfect. Each will have pros and cons which your family and student will need to weigh. Make a pros/cons list while the visit is fresh. Make sure to use those notes they took throughout the day!

### Ask your student to answer these questions:

- How do I feel about my visit overall?
- Can I see myself there? For four years?
- Did I feel like I can be myself?
- Am I excited to be a part of this community?
- Can I see myself connecting to the community outside of campus?

### Does the institution meet your students' needs?

- Do they provide a path that meets my student's career goals?
- Do they have the ability to meet special accommodations they have?
- Did I feel like my student could grow there?

### Can I see them being involved in activities and groups on campus?

#### AFFORDABILITY:

For many families, a decision will come down to affordability. Be careful not to make the mistake of simply choosing the lowest priced college or university reflexively. Consider carefully whether your student will actually have the support they need from faculty and staff to graduate on time. An extra year or even two of a "less expensive" school can suddenly make the slightly more expensive one seem like a bargain. Plus those 5th and 6th years now become "earning" years rather than spending.

Also consider job placement rates and the average salaries made by students from a particular university vs. another. Even a modestly better salary can quickly make up for a slightly more expensive college option in the long run.

#### FINANCIAL AID:

Does the school offer both merit scholarships and need-based aid?

What percentage of students actually pay the sticker price for this college?

If the cost of attendance to one college is less than another, should a family automatically choose the less expensive school?

Does the likelihood of graduating in four years and landing a better paying job affect the cost of attending a fifth year at a less expensive college?

#### IMPORTANT DATES and DEADLINES:

(Dates and deadlines vary among colleges and universities, so be sure to check with the ones you're considering.)

Generally these are accepted dates:

- File your FAFSA anytime after October 1.
- Federal FAFSA forms must be submitted by June 30 for an upcoming academic year.
- FAFSA forms for each individual college and state may have their own deadlines.
- November 15 — Early Action deadline.
- December 15 — Regular Decision begins (generally)
- May 1 is the national decision deadline. (All colleges must honor your acceptance and financial aid until that date.)

Missed a deadline? Reach out to your admissions counselor!

We hope these questions and ideas will help guide you and your family, and ease some of the stress around the college visit process. We hope you'll keep us in mind. Illinois Wesleyan University is an academic community devoted to sparking the curiosity within every learner while providing breakthrough academic quality and rich experiences all within a supportive environment. We may just be the perfect fit for your student!