

10 Mistakes Students and Parents Make When Visiting College Campuses (and How to Avoid Them!)



You and your college-bound teen just spent a day (maybe more) traveling to the first stop on your week-long college road trip. You've settled into your hotel and are planning an early start so you can have a full day on campus. Your teen has dreamed of visiting this college for a long time and you are looking forward to them getting a first-hand feel for this and the other college communities you will be visiting.

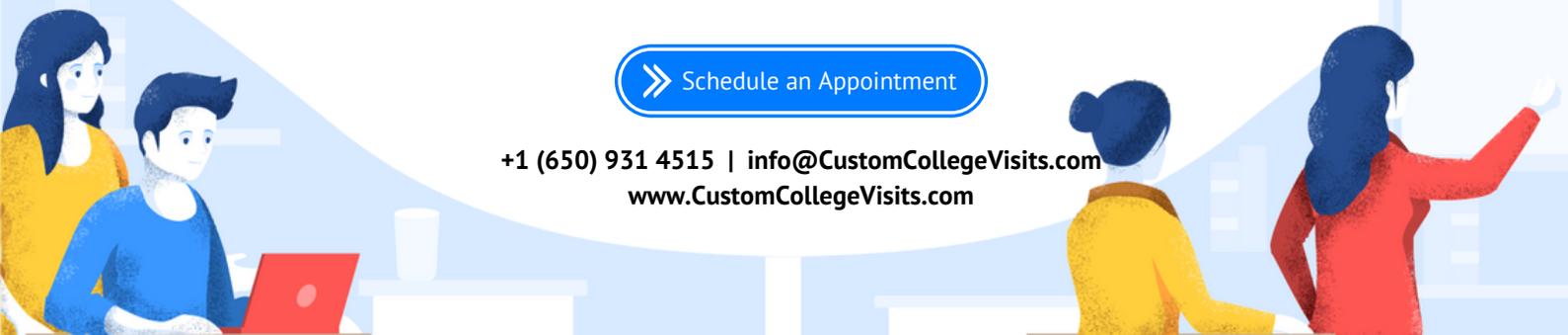
The goal of these college visits is for your teen to become more familiar with the campuses and communities that they visit. But here's the reality: the ordinary college visit experience is like watching a movie trailer--you only see the best parts. Then, when you see the actual movie, it's nothing like the trailer. So it is for many students when they begin their college experience.

Over the past fifteen years, we've heard it time and time again from friends and families (not our clients!) that once their teens have spent some time on campus, their experiences are nothing like what they expected that once their teens have begun their college experience they are nothing like.

You will find that with the proper preparation and research, in-person visits are the best way to become familiar with college campuses. As you plan, consider the following ten mistakes many students and parents make, so both you and your teen avoid making the same ones and can get the most out of each campus visit.

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Mistake #1 – Not registering with the admissions office either before or during your time on campus

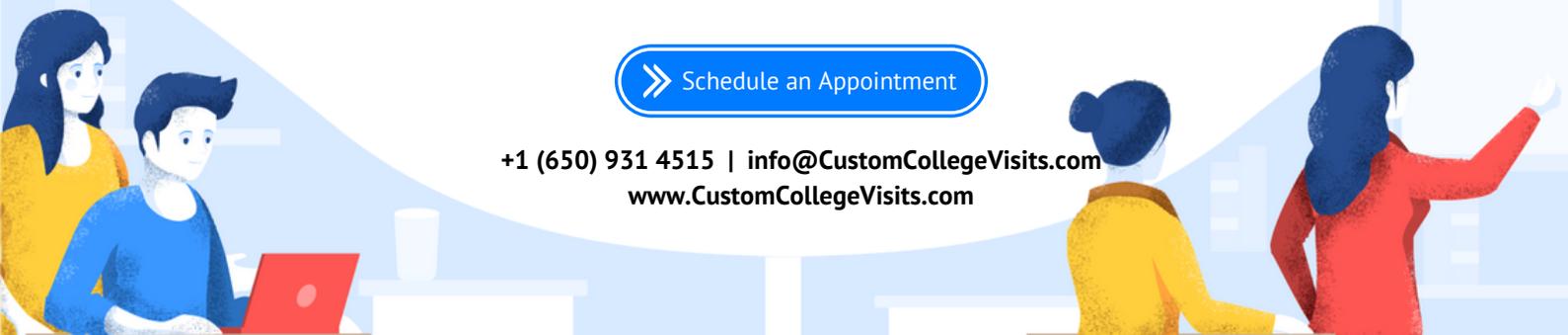
If you don't check in at the admissions offices, colleges have no way of knowing that you were on campus. Visiting a college and letting them know your teen was there may strengthen your teen's chances of admission, because it shows you did your due diligence--commonly referred to as your demonstrated interest.

The more you can connect with a college by attending an information session, taking a walking tour, emailing or interacting with admission officers on social media or attending events in your local area, it will seem to the college and the admissions officers that your teen has done their research and there's a strong possibility that they would accept and enroll if offered admission to that college. Without registering ahead of time, you also run the risk of a tour or information session being full.

Even if you are doing a self-guided tour, make sure the admissions offices know you're on campus. If the office (or visitors center) is open, you can stop by to let them know you would like to have them make a note of your name and information and you can pick up a map and some information about the school at the same time. If they are not open, you can leave a note under the door or taped to the door to let them know that you were there. If you know in advance that they will not be open, check with them to ask the best way to let them know.

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Mistake #2 – Not researching or making pre-arrival plans prior to visiting

Whether it is knowing where to park or setting up an appointment to meet with a student, professor, admission counselor or coach on campus, it's important for you and your child to do your research before you travel.

For instance:

- Parking can be difficult at many colleges and universities and parking tickets can be costly. Also, it may be some distance from the parking area to where the first activity begins; it is beneficial to know how much time to leave in order to park and make it to the event on time. Knowing where to park (and to not park!) in advance will save you both time and trouble. If you cannot find the information online and it is not in your registration materials, give the visitor center or admissions office a call.
- Although your teen might be able to strike up a conversation with a student or two while on campus, and we do recommend that, there is a good chance that they won't be able to spend extensive time with a student or professor unless you have planned the meet-up in advance. In addition, this is the best way to ensure that they can meet with people that are most closely aligned with their interests, both academic and extracurricular. There are opportunities for your teen, they just need to reach out and get commitments and contact information before arriving on campus.

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Mistake #3 - Not having complete contact and meet-up information for your time on campus

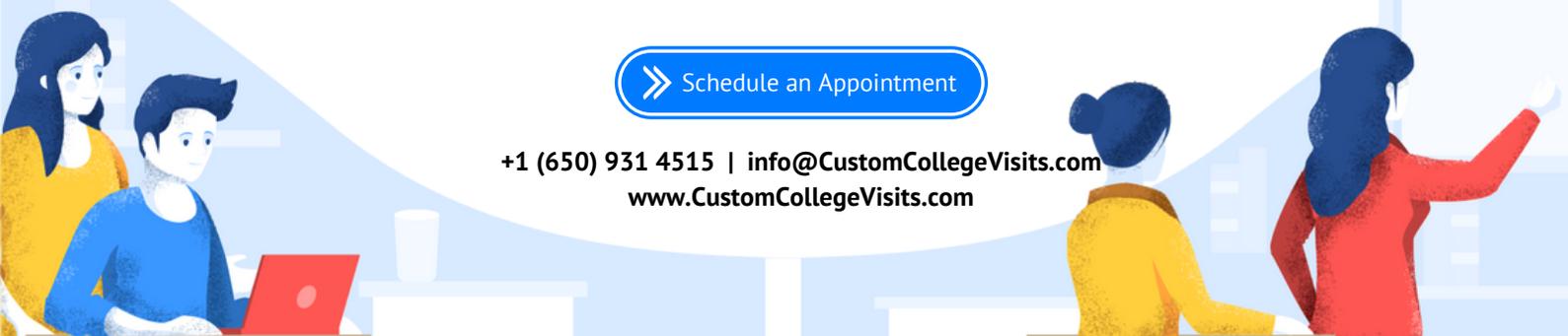
Having each day planned out with times, meeting places, maps and all contact information will make your trip run so much smoother. Even with detailed, daily itineraries at their fingertips, we have had a couple of clients tell us they have forgotten to go to appointments. Imagine how much more difficult it would be to navigate an activity-filled day without this information readily accessible.

If you're stuck in traffic, a meeting has run long or you're lost on campus, having contact information at your fingertips will make it easier for you to let someone know you're still on your way.

Hotel can't find your reservation or you arrive late at night? Having your booking information on your daily itinerary will make it easy for you to retrieve your reservation.

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Mistake #4 - Don't be "that parent"

You expect your teen to be respectful and cordial when on campus, so don't be that parent that other students and parents will talk about after the tour. Remember, this is your teen's time to explore. It is your teen who needs to ask most of the questions, to get the feel of the campus and the college community. But chances are if they're like most teenagers, they won't feel at ease asking questions if you're right beside them or overpowering them. If you think they would be more comfortable if you stay toward the back of the group during a campus tour, stay toward the back. It's ok to ask questions but don't embarrass them or the tour guide. Don't lead, follow. Be helpful but not overpowering.

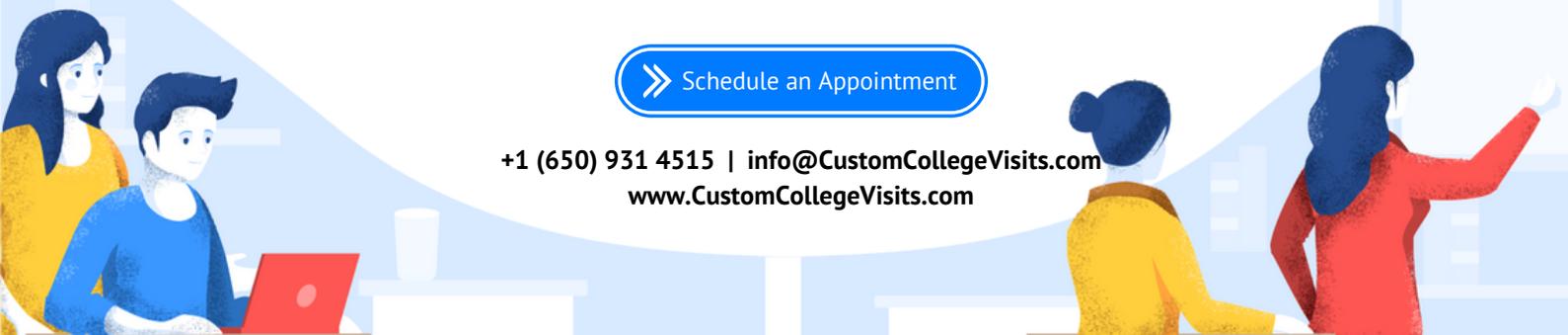
Mistake #5 - Not taking time to explore the campus on your own

When planning your child's on-campus visits, be sure to allow time to look around at all aspects of the college. Let them wander around a bit on their own.

Together you can also visit areas you might not have seen on the tour but are important to them. Are they interested in the performing arts? Find out how to visit the facilities on campus. How about the fine arts? Would it be possible for someone to show them around the studios? Taking the time to explore is well worth the time and effort. It will help your teen determine whether or not the college is a good fit for their personality and for their short and long term goals.

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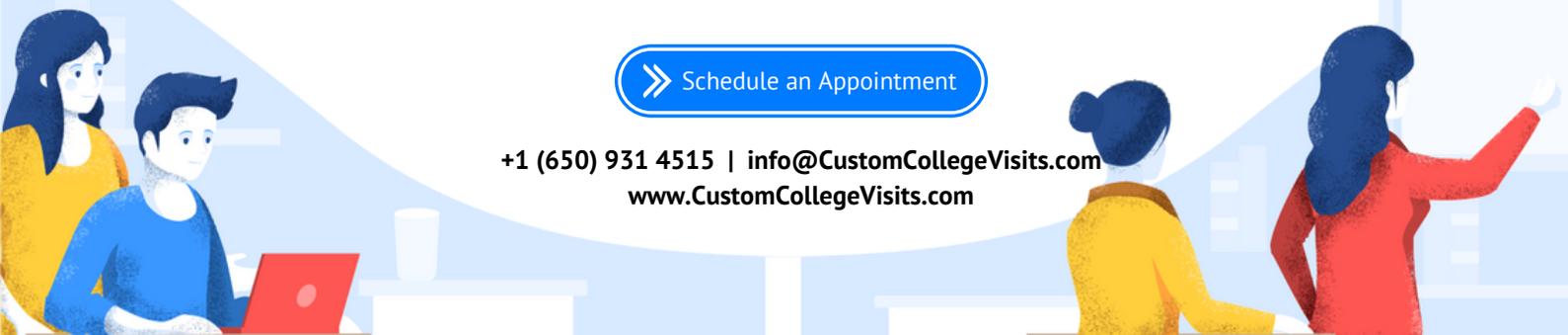
Mistake #6 – Not asking relevant questions

Whether visiting as part of a group or with parents, students should be prepared with questions. Your teen should do some research before they arrive on campus so the questions they ask are those that through their research they have not found answers to--this will allow them to benefit the most from the time they have with tour guides and admissions staff. Some teens hesitate to ask questions because they are shy or afraid they may sound foolish. Others hesitate because they do not want to annoy the other teens and parents in the group. Neither fear is warranted. **In fact there's no better time to ask questions than during a campus tour or admissions information session.** If your teen has questions in mind, they should ask them. It will help them make informed decisions.

It's extremely beneficial to ask additional questions of teaching and laboratory staff, advisors, facility administrators and even current students you may meet throughout the day.

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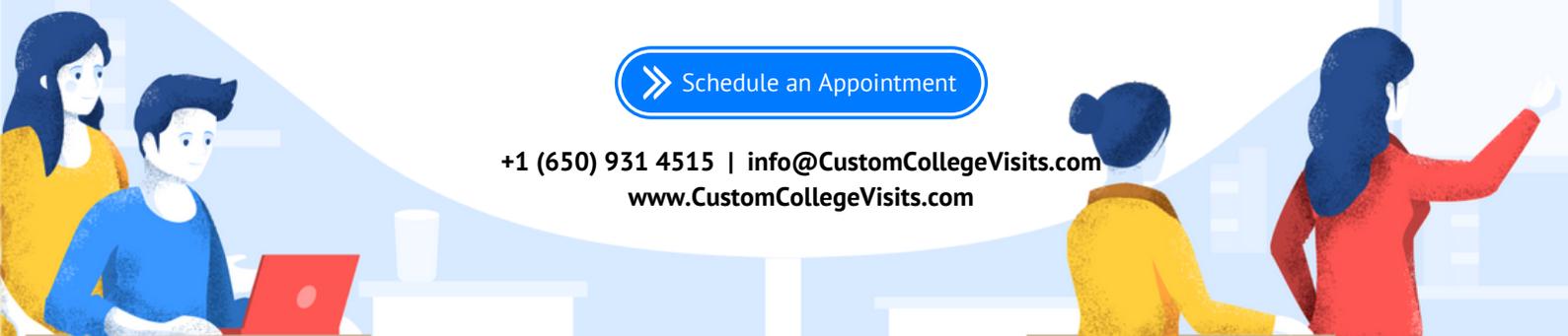
Mistake #7 – Getting impressed by the bells and whistles

Campus visits are a great opportunity for colleges to showcase their services, academics and faculty offerings to eager students and their parents. While most colleges and universities do deliver on their promises, they tend to highlight their best side while downplaying some of their shortcomings. The landscaping along the driveway will probably be immaculate and you are likely to hear about the number of volumes in the library, the new sporting or theater facility or hi-tech classrooms. Don't be immediately swayed. Look around and ask questions.

During your campus visit, it is important to stay focused on what matters most to your teen. But you can also pay attention to the things that you think will make a difference to you as a teen. For instance, if you know your son or daughter is interested in studying STEM, check out the labs and the research facilities--don't get caught up in the hype about the rock climbing wall, if your teen has no intention of using it.

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Mistake #8 – Not making the effort to gather insider information

To find out how things really work, spend some time getting insider information from those who have nothing to gain—current students. Sitting down and having coffee or lunch with a current student will provide valuable insight into the things that really matter to your student. Before the day of your campus visit, make a list of questions to ask students.

Questions your student might ask are:

“What do you like most about the college?”

“Why did you choose this college?”

“What is it like to live in this college dorm?”

“What does your typical weekend look like?”

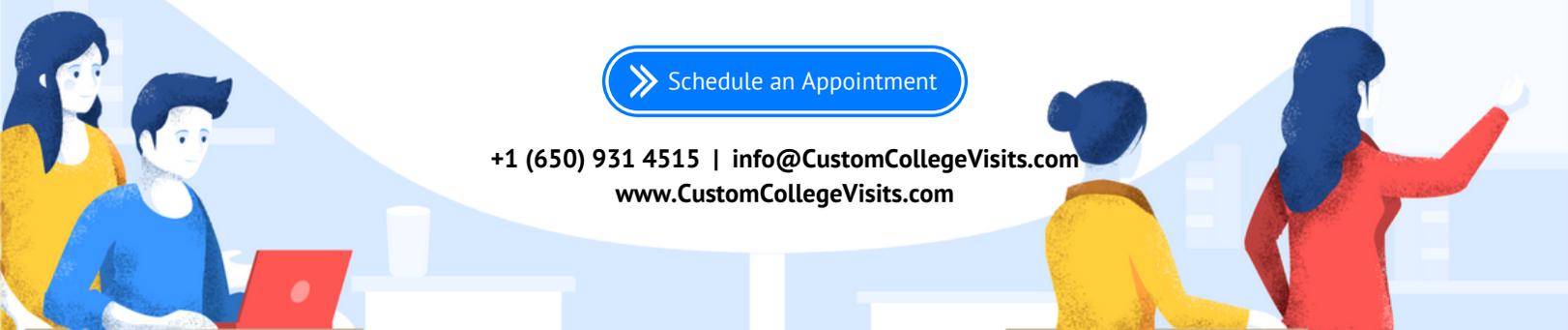
“What don’t you like about the college?”

“Do you find the professors, administrators and staff helpful/supportive?”

“Can I text you if I have additional questions?” (ask for their phone number)

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Mistake #9 – Ignoring the surrounding area

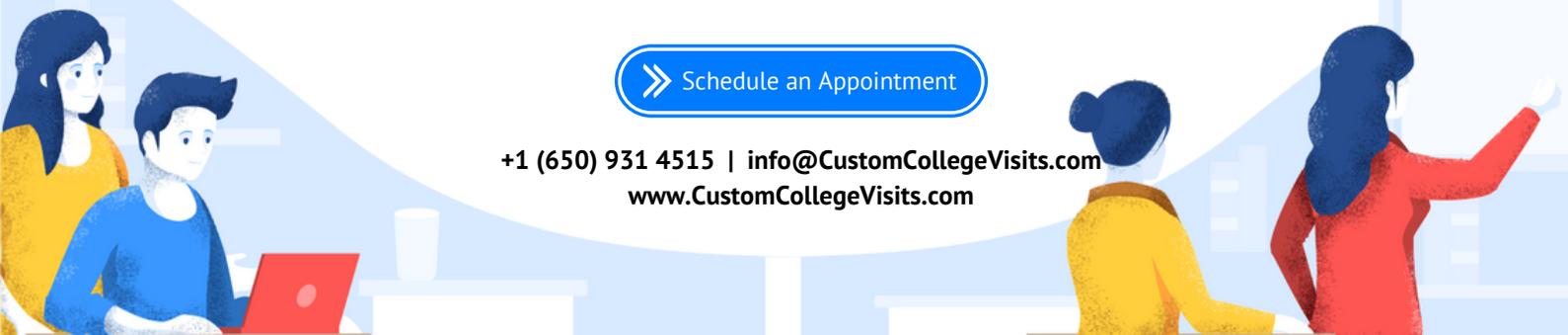
Ignoring the neighborhood surrounding the college is a mistake that could impact your teen's college experience. Each community is completely unique. Let's say you live in a rural area and your teen is visiting a college in a big city with very little campus. Is this the environment that your teen is looking for? Will it be exciting or intimidating and overwhelming? If you have time, hop on a bus or subway that may be the transportation that your teen will use often if they should decide to attend this school. Find out where the dorms will be--will it be too noisy?

If your teen comes from a bigger city with a lot going on, how will it feel to be in a more suburban or rural campus? Is there enough to do on campus that it won't matter? Is there anything to do within a 10-15 minute walk? If not, how easy is it to get downtown--or to the grocery store or Target? If they are not going to have a car, does the school provide transportation or is there a local bus?

Surroundings do matter. Your teen will be spending four to five years in college and it is important to not be in the wrong setting. Spend some time discovering the restaurants, entertainment venues, museums and other facilities that the neighborhood offers and have your teen consider if this is a place where they would be happy to call home.

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Mistake #10 – Wearing high heels!

When I'm visiting college campuses, I often see women wearing high heels and other shoes that aren't made for long walks uphill, downhill and in between. Bring comfortable shoes! You will be doing a lot of walking and you want to make sure that you can focus on the campus visit instead of the discomfort.

Don't forget to bring umbrellas. It may rain while you are visiting some of the college campuses and usually tours operate during rain or shine. Sometimes the colleges will have umbrellas available, but better to be safe than sorry.

Don't forget your reusable water bottles. Campuses are becoming increasingly green and many are no longer selling individual plastic water bottles. They do have stations where you can refill your water bottles.

Make sure to pack your face masks, in case they are needed on certain college campuses and other venues per the colleges' protocols.

We hope this write-up is helpful as you embark on what should be a fun, memorable and successful journey with your teen. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions, require resources, or need advice.

We're here to help!

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