

ENROLLMENT
MANAGEMENT

The Importance of Campus Visits and Strategies for Success

Anthony Schuette
Student Success Toolkit
June 2024

About Student Success Toolkits

The Student Success Toolkits from Trellis Strategies provide evidence-based recommendations for colleges and universities to improve student outcomes. The toolkits summarize the latest research in student success and outline practical steps for administrators and practitioners.

About Trellis Strategies

We are a strategic research and consulting firm dedicated to advancing postsecondary education and strengthening the workforce by delivering unparalleled insights into the modern learner experience, from application through graduation. With over 40 years' experience serving higher education institutions and helping students navigate complex processes, we have the knowledge, insight, and experience to help organizations turn their data into action and action into results.

About the Author

Anthony Schuette is a Research Specialist at Trellis. He received his B.S. in Economics from the University of St. Thomas and later received his M.S. in Applied Economics from the University of Minnesota. Before working at Trellis, Anthony worked as a researcher for the Transportation Policy and Economic Competitiveness Program at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

Recommended Citation

Schuette, A. (2024). *The Importance of Campus Visits and Strategies for Success*. Trellis Strategies.



The Importance of Campus Visits on Student Matriculation

As the number of options for post-secondary students continues to increase, post-secondary institutions are faced with staunch competition for these students in ever-broadening market conditions. Undoubtedly, one thing students want out of college, particularly in on-campus environments, is a sense of belonging. Students' sense of belonging can play a large role in their choice of college¹ and students want to attend schools that demonstrate a commitment to admitting and financially supporting them.² One such way for students to identify this belonging and commitment is through visits to college campuses prior to enrolling.

Campus visits often take a variety of forms. Students may visit a college campus as a part of an educational field trip, participate in a more traditional college visit and tour, or participate in other ways. Research has repeatedly shown that campus visits impact students' college choice^{3,4} and is among the most important factors in that choice.^{5,6} Campus visits offer students the opportunity to learn about their place in a campus environment. They allow students to view facilities, particularly those for their areas of interest, which have been identified as another of the most important factors to a student's college choice.⁷ Campus visits also enable students to get a sense of life on campus, with factors such as campus aesthetics and a general feeling of comfort on the campus being noteworthy to students. Other factors relevant to the visit, such as weather and construction projects, have been found to matter as well.⁸

Research also finds these visits positively impact postsecondary enrollment rates. A 2022 study indicates that both educational campus field trips and traditional visits had an association with postsecondary enrollment rates. Traditional campus visits were found to have a stronger impact than other visits.⁹ What's more, engaging with younger students may prove beneficial to their college preparatory behavior. Visits taken earlier in a students' academic careers were positively associated with postsecondary enrollment rates.⁹ Eighth grade students who took multiple visits to a college campus report higher levels of knowledge about college, college efficacy, and have more conversations about college with school personnel.¹⁰ Engaging with students at this age is furthermore identified as beneficial, as for students who are nearing high school graduation, many college access initiatives intervene too late for students who have already been dissuaded from postsecondary education by their prior experiences and low expectations for post-secondary education opportunity, as post-secondary aspirations are generally formed in a students' early high school years.¹⁰⁻¹² Research has also identified that having staff, faculty and current students available to prospective students during visits is important. One study found that campus visits that included meetings with STEM professors significantly increased the odds of students expressing STEM career aspirations.¹³

Key recommendations



Target students early



Develop a visit that includes key campus characteristics



Provide a forum for questions



Allow for personal engagement



Offer a personalized follow-up



Takeaways

Campus visits are a low-cost way for higher education institutions to connect with prospective students and show off their campus as an attractive, safe, and welcoming place to pursue a post-secondary education. It is also an opportunity to connect prospective students with the people and resources to ensure a smooth transition into post-secondary life. Campus visits offer the opportunity to demonstrate how not only the campus, but the people on the campus, are committed to their fellow community members. Every detail counts to students and their families; recognizing this fact is a crucial first step to making campus visits count.



CAMPUS VISITS OFFER THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE HOW NOT ONLY THE CAMPUS, BUT THE PEOPLE ON THE CAMPUS, ARE COMMITTED TO THEIR FELLOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

CASE STUDY

Franklin & Marshall College

Renovations to the Franklin & Marshall College admissions office included an upgrade to the reception area, “with a fireplace installed and improvements to traffic flow. The facility includes first-floor interview rooms that are accessible and appealing. To create a warm welcome, quality of coffee was improved, candy in campus colors is distributed, and a lemonade stand staffed by tour guides is set up on hot summer days. Application numbers improved in the first

year following the changes. By the second year, the conversion rate for students touring campus improved by about 15 percent. The percentage of students surveyed reporting that they were much more interested in Franklin & Marshall after their visit increased from 41 percent before the changes to 72 percent. Total visitors and number of applications also increased.”¹⁶



Where to start?



Overall, research on campus visits lends itself to five important takeaways and best practices.

1

Focus on the visitor experience.

Working to ensure that campus aesthetics are in their best condition, and prospective students can begin to see themselves on campus, is crucial. This is especially important for first-impression details, and a good general flow of the visit. Issues with scheduling, parking, reception, and follow-up can all present barriers to students enjoying their visit and set the lens through which students will see campus. A great campus tour can be negated entirely by a hassle to park or find the front entrance.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Furthermore, highlighting amenities in the neighborhood, safety features of the campus and transportation options can help students recognize their place not only on campus, but in the community as well.

As a part of the visitor experience, making campus visits accessible to all is important. Transportation to and from campus can be crucial to a student deciding to make a visit. There are numerous ways to accomplish this. Some schools may offer free bus rides for the student and one guest to and from the campus. Not only does this demonstrate a commitment to the student, but also showcases the capabilities of public transportation around campus. Another option is to simply provide reimbursement of travel expenses for student and one guest on the day of their campus visit. For younger students, an overnight experience in the dormitory for students can be an exciting way for students to familiarize themselves with the campus environment. Transportation for these overnight experiences is especially important.

2

Be intentional with visits.

Make visits start at an attractive building that serves as the symbolic centerpiece of the school. Ensure this building has a welcoming and comfortable reception area, with light refreshments for visitors. This demonstrates early on the welcoming and caring nature of the school and gives students a sense of belonging. Give prospective students the opportunity to view living arrangements, important buildings and landmarks and any points of interest they wish to see. Offering opportunities to delve into personal interests is important. What's more, designing visits to increase the likelihood of prospective students interacting with faculty and students can help them form relationships and aids in a sense of belonging among students.¹⁶

3

Provide a forum for questions.

Have staff on hand to answer questions about financial aid, logistics and on-campus activities. Keep in mind, students are preparing for this visit as well and will likely come with their own individual ideas of what is important to them. Allowing students and parents a space to learn about your institution is a great way to demonstrate transparency. Numerous organizations author guides for students going on visits, including universities. Many of these guides recommend coming ready with questions, trying to personalize their visit, following up with special appointments and learning about the community.^{17,18} In this way, being prepared to match students' expectations about campus visits is paramount to successful visits.

4

Focus on personalization.

Campus visits can help students get a good understanding of what a college can be to them. However, one visit is not enough for many students to be sufficiently familiar with a campus to make a fully formed opinion of a school. Giving students the opportunity to make the most of their visit with time for personalized activities and following up with students with opportunities for further learning opportunities related to their major, sports or other activities is a good way to showcase an understanding of students as individuals.

5

Offer visits to younger students.

Research shows that getting students interested in college early on in their education is important to their decision to attend college. Offering field trips, workshops and other visits to middle school and early high school students can help those students develop their post-secondary aspirations.

References

- 1 Allen WR, Bonous-Hammarth M, Suh SA, Allen W. Who Goes to College? *High School Context, Academic Preparation, the College Choice Process, and College Attendance.*; 2004.
- 2 Comeaux E, Chapman TK, Contreras F. The College Access and Choice Processes of High-Achieving African American Students: A Critical Race Theory Analysis. *Am Educ Res J.* 2020;57(1):411-439. doi:10.3102/0002831219853223
- 3 Secore S. The Significance of Campus Visitation to College Choice and Strategic Enrollment Management. *Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly.* 2018;5(4):150-158. doi:10.1002/sem3.20114
- 4 King SB. Increasing College-Going Rate, Parent Involvement, and Community Participation in Rural Communities. *The Rural Educator.* 2018;33(2). doi:10.35608/ruraled.v33i2.415
- 5 Cohen S. What colleges don't know about admissions. *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* Published 2009. Accessed December 20, 2023. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/what-colleges-dont-know-about-admissions/>
- 6 Yost M, Tucker SL. Tangible evidence in marketing of a service: the value of a campus visit in choosing a college. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education.* Published online 1995:47-67.
- 7 McDonald LS. The Impact of Campus Facilities on the Recruitment of Students in Higher Education Dissertations. *Western Kentucky University Dissertations.* Published online 2019. Accessed December 20, 2023. <https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/diss/170>
- 8 Okerson JR. Beyond The Campus Tour: College Choice and the Campus Visit. *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects William & Mary.* Published online 2016.
- 9 Corinne Smith M, Gosky RM, Li JT, Corinne M. *Campus Visits as Predictors of Postsecondary Enrollment in Low-Income, Rural School Districts.* Vol 7.; 2022.
- 10 Swanson E, Kopotic K, Zamarro G, Mills JN, Greene JP, W. Ritter G. An Evaluation of the Educational Impact of College Campus Visits: A Randomized Experiment. *AERA Open.* 2021;7:233285842198970. doi:10.1177/2332858421989707
- 11 Anders J, Micklewright J. Teenagers' Expectations of Applying to University: How do they Change? *Educ Sci (Basel).* 2015;5(4):281-305. doi:10.3390/educsci5040281
- 12 Hossler D, Braxton J, Coopersmith G. Understanding student college choice. *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research.* Published online 1989:231-288.
- 13 Kitchen JA, Sonnert G, Sadler P. Campus Visits: Impact of a College Outreach Strategy on Student STEM Aspirations. *J Stud Aff Res Pract.* 2020;57(3):266-281. doi:10.1080/19496591.2019.1653312
- 14 Kallay J. Marketing the campus experience. In: Westman C, ed. *Sharing the Campus Experience: Hosting Effective Campus Visits.* American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers; 2009:45-47.
- 15 Johnson B. Slaying the campus visit vampire. In: Westman C, ed. *Sharing the Campus Experience: Hosting Effective Campus Visits.* American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers; 2009:1-5.
- 16 Rathemacher A, MacDonnell C, Miles L, et al. *The Campus Visit Experience: Improving Student Recruitment at the University of Rhode Island.*; 2011. Accessed December 20, 2023. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED517964.pdf>
- 17 Lytle R, Moody J. 14 Tips for an Effective College Visit. *U.S. News & World Report.* Published 2021. Accessed December 20, 2023. <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/slideshows/10-tips-for-an-effective-college-visit?slide=18>
- 18 University of Minnesota Office of Admissions. Five Tips for Successful Campus Visit.

Evolving for the
modern learner.
