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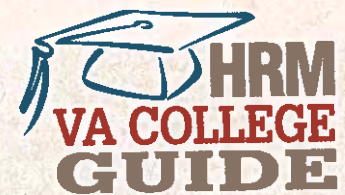
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 HRM
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 GUIDE

Touring Tips

AFTER YEARS OF ASKING YOUR CHILD TO BE QUIET, IT'S FINALLY TIME TO DO THE REVERSE WHEN VISITING THEIR TOP COLLEGES



By Kristen De Deyn Kirk

My college job was giving campus tours, and I was always shocked at how little people asked. Considering this was pre-website, Facebook and Twitter days, they didn't have much to go on besides a brochure or a catalog. How could they only ask about how many volumes we had in the library and how big the dorm rooms were? I gave exact details in reply, but I always wanted to shout out: "A lot" and "very small" to these irrelevant questions and then talk about stuff that really mattered.

Speaking with two local rising college freshmen and one current college junior recently, I was thrilled to learn that they—and their parents—are much better prepared. Here are their top questions for student tour guides, in no particular order:

1. How much time do you spend studying?
2. Where do you study? (This will give you a sense of how quiet the dorms are.)
3. How would you describe the food? "Most colleges require you to have a meal plan your first year at school," says Alex Mundorff, a junior at William & Mary. "Ask how good it is, because it's a big deal."

4. How easy is it to park your car? (I can't speak from personal experience, but a student at William & Mary who I know says it "sucks." Of course, you probably won't base your decision on this fact; you'll just be prepared to leave yourself a lot of time to find a spot.)
5. How hard is it to get into classes? Does your advisor really help? Is there a crazed, in-person sign-up for classes you failed to get during the pre-registration process? Do fights practically break out? Or do you have to sit in on a class for a week or two, in hopes that you might be allowed in by an over-worked professor who doesn't really want another student?
6. How are the dorms situated? Single or double room? Hall or suite bathrooms? How are they assigned? Do they have air conditioning?
7. Are dorms co-ed? "That's the question my dad asks!" says Katie Spruill, a senior at Grassfield High School, who is considering Tennessee, NC State, ECU, JMU, Virginia Tech, Sweetbriar and William & Mary. Her parents also ask about questions eight through 10. (The younger Spruill asks questions 11 through 15, after checking online about the school's size, majors and average GPAs and SAT/ACT scores.)
8. Is there a lot of stress in certain majors?
9. What is security like on campus?
10. How accessible are guidance counselors?
11. Do students receive free seating at football games? Or do they have to buy tickets? Or is there a raffle?
12. What is the Greek life like on campus?
13. What are some of the clubs/activities that are popular on campus (from a student's perspective)?
14. Can dorms have loft or raised beds? (A great way to cram more into those small rooms.)
15. Does the college offer a study-abroad program? And is it a lot more expensive than regular tuition?
16. How involved and integrated is the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corp) program? "I have a ROTC scholarship, so this is important to me," says John Newell, a senior from Chesapeake who is considering UVA, NC State and ODU. "I want to know if the ROTC students are at school activities and if they have separate dorm areas and rules. I eliminated one school where that was the case. I would have had a curfew of 9:30 p.m. and been in a different area away from other students."
17. How well do foreign-born teachers speak English?
18. Is the student's favorite activity, sport or club in high school available at the college? If he or she can't play for the school's varsity team, do they have intramural teams?
19. How big are the classes? Ask for the tour guide's experience, not the average or teacher-student ratio.
20. How accessible are the teachers? Do they have open door policies? Give out email addresses?
21. What is the male-female ratio?
22. What nights are big party nights?
23. Do most students stay on campus during the weekend?
24. How does the school help students get internships and jobs?
25. What would you change about the school?

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