

## **VENTURA COUNTY STAR**

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### **This is season to check out, visit colleges**

For high school seniors, this is the season to visit college campuses to see which ones are worth applying to. As teens travel to campuses near and far with their parents, everyone in the car might be tempted to ask, "Is this worth it?" You bet. Many students applying to college tend to think of campus visits as a way to get facts about admission requirements and the college's programs. However, and more importantly, college visits give students the "real deal" of the campus atmosphere in terms of its personality, vibe and social quality. For example, while one student might feel isolated in an urban university with 40,000 students walking around, another may find this environment a perfect fit.

I have worked with students who based their college choice on photos, Internet information, and what their friends and family have told them. While this works out well for some students, others are not so lucky. They become the panicked students who return home after their first semester with hopes of transferring to another college that better suits their needs. As a result, they revisit the entire college process.

When visiting colleges, there are good visits and bad visits. The bad ones waste your time, and the good ones take some prep work. Below are some tips your teen can use to ensure a quality college visit:

- Use your senses. Touch the facilities, taste the food, talk and listen to students and faculty, see the resident halls and watch the campus unfold before your eyes. Do you see yourself among the students? If the answer is no, then you know not to waste your energy applying to a college that isn't a good fit for you.
- Limit yourself to two college visits a day. Students who push for more tend to get burned out and forget which program belonged to what college.
- Make reservations and dress comfortably. Many colleges require reservations two to three weeks ahead of time, so make sure that you are on the list. If not, you can take a self-guided tour, but it's difficult to lead yourself and family around a campus that you know nothing about. Hopefully, you'll find a nice student on campus to take you around.
- Take notes. After each visit, take 20 minutes to jot down your impressions of the campus. Include detailed descriptions of the students, food, residence halls, etc.

Use this information to determine the match between the college campus and your teen. Just as each student is unique in his or her abilities, personality and other qualities, so is each college campus.

So when teens pack their pen, notebook, reservation schedule and a good pair of tennis shoes, they realize that this road trip is more than a brief visit -- it's a glimpse at their new home.

-- Sonja Montiel, M.A., is founder of College Confidence, a Westlake Village-based college counseling firm. Montiel serves on the executive board of the Western Association of College Admissions Counselors, is active with the National Association of College Admission Counseling and serves on the planning committee for Ventura County's National College Fair. She is also a member of the Higher Educational Consultants Association. For information, call 407-7023 or visit <http://www.collegeconfidence.com>.