

Understanding Unofficial Visits

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If you are seriously interested in pursuing your sport in college, it is highly recommended to visit a lot of college campuses early in your high school career. It allows you to compare campus facilities, gain a better understanding of the admissions process, meet with various faculty in your potential academic major(s), and see up-close the demands of being a college student.

Being a student-athlete creates the need for a whole other level of perspective in evaluating a college. As a recruiting educator who regularly helps families with the college recruiting process through individual and group consulting, I am often approached after a seminar at a club or high school. Usually it is a family who is struggling to make a decision and they are looking for specific criteria to help them in differentiating between a vast amount of opportunities. I always ask if they have done a campus visit to compare and contrast. The majority who are so distraught in making a decision, have only looked at websites and financial numbers. I always recommend making a campus visit to as many schools possible.

Who Pays for The Unofficial Visit?

An unofficial visit to a college by a prospective student-athlete is a visit made at the prospective student-athlete's own expense.

How Many Unofficial Visits Can I Do to a Specific Campus?

Although there are some restrictions for some sports in terms of timing in your high school career for unofficial visits, typically you can do an unlimited number of unofficial visits. It is important to note that you cannot do an unofficial visit during any dead periods which vary in timing by sport. I would suggest checking the NCAA website for recruiting calendars that describe the specifics for each sport.

How Many Unofficial Visits Can I Do Overall?

There is no limit on the number of unofficial visits you can take to various campuses. Again, you may not do the visits during dead periods for your sport. It is also important to understand that most sports (with specific recruiting class restrictions on the sports mentioned above), allow you to speak with coaching staff while on campus.

What Should I Bring with Me on an Unofficial Visit?

I would recommend that you print off a copy of the campus map. I would encourage you to ask admissions, prior to traveling to campus, of the best location for parking when you first arrive. Parking on many college campuses can be very difficult, especially when you are uncertain of your surroundings.

I would also recommend bringing a copy of your recent transcripts, test scores, a 1-page player profile/resume including your NCAA Eligibility Center ID number, any letters of recommendation, and other supporting materials demonstrating why they should consider you. It is imperative that you spend a lot of time on the college website PRIOR to your visit, to familiarize yourself with the college structure, campus layout, and offices you wish to meet with during your visit.

You should also have a list of questions with you to ask admissions, current students, faculty, and athletic staff. You can check out the *13 Questions to Ask a College Coach* post here!

What Should I Wear on An Unofficial Campus Visit?

I would recommend your first priority is comfortable walking shoes, as you will typically do a lot of walking. You should be wanting to make a good first impression, but you do not have to be in a business suit. I would encourage you to think “business casual”. I would recommend a nice button-down shirt (tucked-in) and dress pants for men. For women, I would recommend a casual skirt or dress pants and nice blouse or sweater. I would also encourage you to dress in layers, as many campus buildings have the air conditioning on high when it is summer and vice versa, during the winter months.

Will the School Pay for Anything While I Am on Campus?

The college is very limited in what they are allowed to do while you are on campus in terms of covering your expenses. They may be able to transport you to view practice facilities, or they may be allowed to pick up one meal in the on-campus dining facility or at a local restaurant for the prospective student-athlete and relatives/legal guardians of the student-athlete. I highly recommend that you do not have any expectations of them covering payments of anything for you while on campus.

Can I Stay Overnight in the Residence Halls on an Unofficial Campus Visit?

The prospective student-athlete may stay in an enrolled student-athletes’ dorm if they pay the going rate for regular (non-athletic) prospective students for such lodging. At a majority of colleges, this is complimentary, but some will charge, so it is important to ask. You should ask this when you are setting up the unofficial visit, not just the day of the visit.

What Will I Be Able to Do on an Unofficial Campus Visit?

On most colleges you may take a campus tour, meet with the admissions and financial aid, tour residence halls, eat in the dining facilities, and meet with faculty in your desired academic major (s). Basically, anything that a “regular” prospective student would do in evaluating a college is typically allowed.

What About Meeting with The Coaching Staff?

Insider tip: College coaches do NOT like it when you just show up unannounced in their office. Instead, try to arrange through admissions or your high school/club coach a week or two out from the visit. With hundreds of recruits that email college coaches each month, they also want to refresh their memory of which recruit you are in terms of talent, academics, and your social media prior to having a conversation with you. Trust me, setting something up (if the NCAA allows for your sport/graduation year) PRIOR to showing up is highly encouraged.

In addition, I always recommend letting a coach know you are going to be coming to a competition prior to just showing up, if you are looking to have any amount of time with them. Whether they love you as a recruit or do not know a thing about you, it is imperative to understand on competition days, that they may not have a lot of time to spend with you, no matter how far you traveled.

Having been a college coach for 14 years in NCAA DI and II, I will tell you the day of a game is some of the busiest days for a coach, especially the head coach. I would always recommend coming in the day before a competition (versus just the day of a game) to hopefully get a little bit of time with some of the coaching staff.

How Do I Set-Up an Unofficial Visit?

It is recommended you set up an unofficial campus visit through admissions, especially if the college coach cannot directly contact you due to your graduation year recruiting regulations. If a college coach cannot contact you directly, you should utilize your high school or club coach to aid in communication. However, in some sports depending on your graduation year, this may not be permissible. Depending on the college, they may also utilize their admissions staff to set-up athletic meetings.

However, I would copy the coach on all correspondence, even if they do not respond. Remember, all of this correspondence should come from the student-athlete, and NOT the parent. Parents, we know you are just trying to help, but it really actually hurts the process.

I highly recommend you plan out multiple campus visits early on in your high school careers, even if the coaches are not available to meet with you. Being on different types of campuses will definitely give you a different perspective compared to the college brochures and websites. Want to know about Campus Visits? Read part 2 of our series here: Official Visits.