

A Quick Guide to College Visits and Interviews

YOU get to decide what life after high school looks like. While this may be an overwhelming time, you are surrounded by support and resources. The following guide will help you prepare for researching colleges with the goal of finding a great fit for YOU. We encourage all students to view college visits (virtual or in person), workshops, and programs as opportunities to discover what you want and narrow down your options. You will continue to get closer and closer to picking a handful of colleges where you can thrive and launch your post MHS journey!

Getting to Know a College to Determine if it's a Great Fit!

- Dig into a college's website including the course catalog, support services, career support, housing, dining, and study abroad
- Take a tour (or online) to get a sense of campus
- Research the area: "walk around" off campus using maps and check their weather trends
- Follow them on social media
- Check out their online student newspaper
- Reach out to current students
- Schedule an interview or a meeting with a professor

Some Criteria That Might Be Important To You

- Happiness: MHS believes selectivity does not guarantee success and happiness. Only apply to schools you are excited about.
- Size: small, medium, large, does it also have a graduate school or a hospital, do students stay on campus all four years
- Location: urban, rural, suburban, how far it is from home, weather, culture fit
- Rigor: will you feel appropriately challenged, will this college cause you stress
- Social: does the vibe of the school excite you, will you enjoy the social offerings: sports, clubs, Greek life
- Support: does this college have what you're looking for in terms of academic support, financial support, and career support

Opportunities to Learn

- College Hosted Events: tours, information sessions, workshops
- McLean Hosted Events: college visits, Junior Focus Day and College Planning Night, workshops
- FCPS Hosted Events: college fairs, workshops, virtual college week
- Interviews: informational and evaluative – check out page 2 for more!

You Can Ask About...

- Academics: class size, student to faculty ratio, academic support services, majors and minors
- Research: undergraduate research, honors college, experiential learning
- Financial Aid: does the college offer merit scholarships, does the college meet 100% need, are students automatically considered for scholarships or do they apply to them separately
- Student Body: size, diversity, LGBTQ+, gender, culture, politics, international population
- Social: dorm choice, food, student clubs, sports, Greek system, leadership opportunities
- Study Abroad/Internships: what supports are there, how many students participate
- Outcomes: graduation rate (in 4 years), job or grad school success, starting salary

The College Interview

There are several variations in the interview policies at colleges. If the college does offer interviews, we recommend that you take advantage of the opportunity. Interviews, the activities list, and essays are ways that you can show college admissions professionals who you are in an otherwise data-driven process.

The **evaluative interview** is intended to help the institution assess the student as a candidate. The interviewer speaks with the student, takes notes, and reports their impressions to the admissions committee. Their evaluation becomes part of the student's application file. The interviewer is often an admissions officer but may be a faculty member or an alum.

The **informational interview** is intended to give the student information about the institution. This can be a one-on-one talk with a college representative or a group information session for applicants. The interviewer may be an admissions officer, but might also be a faculty member, an alum, or even a current student at the college.

How to Prepare for the Interview

- Have five questions you want to ask during the interview but try to avoid what you could easily answer on their website
- Have five facts you want the interviewer to know about you, focusing on your accomplishments and interests
- Have a few well-thought-out reasons you are considering the college

Frequently asked questions:

- Why are you considering this college?
- What are your academic/career interests?
- How would you describe yourself to someone who does not know you?
- What magazines and newspapers do you read?
- What books that are not required by your courses have you read recently?
- How do you spend a typical afternoon after school? Weekend?
- What extracurricular activities have you found the most satisfying? Why?
- If you could talk with any one living person, whom would it be and why?
- What has been your proudest achievement?

Tips for a Successful Interview

- Research the college and surrounding area
- Be enthusiastic and gracious
- Dress to show that the interview is important to you
- If your interview is online, make sure your background isn't distracting
- Don't bring a parent into the interview
- Always follow up with a thank you email

Questions? Reach out to Mrs. Barnes, mkbarnes@fcps.edu or your school counselor. You've got this!