



The Campus Visit Chronicles

In what one might call the rite of passage *before* the rite of passage that is college, each fall thousands of parents take their high school–age kids across America to tour university campuses. Here, five writers tell the stories of their visits—and how their children made the big decision of where to begin their adult lives.



It Had Her Name on It

A month or so into my freshman year of college at the University of Southern California, a friend convinced me to road-trip from Los Angeles to the Bay Area for a football game at the University of California, Berkeley. On that trip north I met a Cal student who would become my husband—and in the process kicked off a (mostly) friendly intra-family rivalry.

Fast-forward through decades of football Saturdays (mostly ending in USC victories), and the time arrived for our oldest daughter to choose a college. With a delicate family balance at stake—and our daughter gravitating toward leaving California for the East Coast anyway—my husband and I agreed to try to keep our opinions to ourselves.

The campus tours took priority, but we made a point to have fun—sometimes more than I expected. While waiting for a tour to begin at Swarthmore College, my daughter looked around and whispered, “I feel like I’m in a Harry Potter movie.” That environment may have appealed to some kids, but I could see she didn’t mean it as a compliment.

This page, from top: the Campanile at the University of California, Berkeley; the Sarah P. Duke Gardens in Durham, North Carolina; decorative flamingos at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; Zingerman’s Delicatessen in Ann Arbor, Michigan



We slipped away and headed into downtown Philadelphia, where instead of focusing on the future we appreciated the past, wandering Independence Mall, studying the crack in the Liberty Bell, and snacking on Tastykake Butterscotch Krimpets.

On another trip, after a five-hour flight across the country to North Carolina, it took all of five minutes for the competing hues of blue at Duke University and UNC Chapel Hill to sweep my daughter off her feet. We were charmed by the campuses, the Sarah P. Duke Gardens, Chapel Hill’s bustling Franklin Street, the Southern hospitality, and, most of all, the biscuits and gravy.

When acceptances began rolling in, however, her mindset shifted, as she seemed pleasantly surprised by a few West Coast options. At her request, we took one final trip to a campus just an hour’s drive from our home, where a different shade of collegiate blue convinced her that “California girl” had a nice ring to it.

I should have seen it coming—after all, my daughter’s name is Berklee. We spelled it differently than her father’s alma mater, but it’s pronounced the same, and the heckling I endured from friends and family peaked when she enrolled at **UC Berkeley**. If that’s not enough, she loved her time at Cal so much that a couple of years later her younger sister went there too.

So, I lost the battle of the alma maters. I may be outnumbered now, but at least having the kids close to home is a win. And, there’s always grad school.

—DANA REBMANN



Shopping for the Future

At the tender age of 17, my son beheld the bleakest of winter days on the tundra that is Iowa in January—and saw his future. Not the snow drifts and frost creeping across the car windshield, but the shimmering image of himself on a leafy campus with a diverse student body, a science lab named for the alum who created the microchip, and opportunities for small classes and individual projects.

Developing such a three-dimensional forecast took two years of research. As a family, we took the approach that we were shopping for a future—Seth’s future—which is a very big buy. First,



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