

## OREGON GEAR UP TOOLKIT

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# Campus Visits for Younger Students

strategies and resources for colleges to engage younger students

### REACHING HIGHER

RIGOR

RELEVANCE

RELATIONSHIPS

### RAISING AWARENESS

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Parents Community Teachers



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# REACHING HIGHER

Create a school environment, policies, and teacher expectations that support all students' pursuit of a postsecondary education.

# RAISING AWARENESS

Promote early awareness of college preparation, selection, admissions, financial aid and other critical steps for college entry.



**DOWNLOAD PRINT-AND-USE RESOURCES:** [bit.ly/25yyXjs](http://bit.ly/25yyXjs)

*Look for the printer icon and green text throughout the toolkit!*

- Southern Oregon University Trivia Game
- Oregon State University "Get To Know OSU" Quest
- Photo Scavenger Hunt
- Student and Chaperone Expectations

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## Sources & More Information

Association for Middle Level Education, [Facilitating College Readiness through Campus Life Experiences](#)

Mandy Savitz-Romer & Suzanne M. Bouffard, [Ready, Willing and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Readiness](#)

The Bridgespan Group, [Reclaiming the American Dream](#)

Higher Education Coordinating Commission, [Pathway to Progress](#)

National Center for Education Statistics, [Immediate Transition to College](#)

# WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Low-income students are less likely to access higher education than their higher income peers. Similarly, rural college attainment is lower than urban and suburban counterparts, and students from rural Oregon are less likely to attend a 4-year university. In order to encourage student aspirations for postsecondary education, it's vital for students to be able to see themselves as college students. College campus visits are one way of encouraging this college-going identity. On-campus experiences have been shown to increase both college aspirations and knowledge. Even one day visits have the power to inspire both students and parents and inform them of the possibilities. In fact, students whose parents accompany them on campus visits have increased odds of attending college. Campus visits can also help reinforce key concepts about the application and financial aid process and provide an opportunity to build relationships with college students and staff.



Oregon GEAR UP supports schools in their efforts to set high academic expectations, promote early awareness of college opportunities, and engage students in college and career planning, all with an eye toward increasing the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary programs. We encourage our schools to expose their students at a young age to college campuses, and provide them with a [College Visits Toolkit](#) in order to make it a successful and intentional experience.

Planning and executing programs for younger students can seem daunting and out of the scope of most college staff responsible for campus visit programs. However, as you may have already experienced, increasing numbers of groups (not just GEAR UP schools) are requesting campus visits for younger students.

“The biggest thing [for our students] is exposure about what college looks like and what it takes to go to college. College visits make kids feel connected to that and to see it as a possibility. We talk about college in weekly sessions but getting on campus makes a huge difference. -GEAR UP Principal

In order to help colleges navigate this new reality, we offer this toolkit to college personnel as a companion piece to our College Visits Toolkit in hopes that those on both sides of the desk have the tools necessary to work together in doing what's best for Oregon's students. This toolkit will provide **high-impact, yet low-effort** strategies and resources to involve younger students in your college's campus visit program.



# WHY? EARLY EXPOSURE: IT MATTERS

Increasing college access for low-income, first-generation college-bound, and other underrepresented groups is an integral element to **increase college enrollment and diversity** on campus. In addition, there is greater attention being paid to college selection and fit, specifically to combat “undermatching”: when academically talented students fail to even apply for more selective colleges.

Research shows the importance of starting college and career planning and awareness in middle school (or earlier!) **Early exposure to a college campus makes a difference**, especially for rural students who have little

opportunity to visit colleges. Federal grant dollars are now being tied to increasing college awareness at an early age. As a result, there are more schools and groups seeking campus visits for younger students.

Therefore, although outreach to younger students might not be part of your college or department’s mission, it is valuable to consider some way to support students at this critical age. Additionally, one benefit to offering visit opportunities for younger students is that when they return as juniors as seniors, the students will be better prepared to participate in traditional campus visit programs.





# WHAT? CONTENT & MESSAGING



The information that a middle school or early high school student needs about college is very different than that of a junior or senior in high school. The messages that are conveyed during the visit should be **developmentally appropriate** and use common language that students will understand (watch out for acronyms!)

The early adolescent years are characterized by a preoccupation with identity and image, therefore college preparation curricula usually begins with self-exploration (*Who am I? Who do I want to be?*) and then moves on to planning (*How do I get there?*). Different groups will have varying levels of college knowledge prior to the visit, but in general, younger students are not concerned about specific details like a college's faculty-to-student ratio or application deadlines. Instead, they are most

interested in whether college is for them and if they can see themselves as a college student. Therefore, re-frame the campus visit as an opportunity to share key messages about college accessibility and preparation.

## ► KEY MESSAGES FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

- College is for people like you.
- College is relevant to your career interests.
- College is attainable (academically and financially).
- College is fun and an opportunity to learn and try new things and meet new people.
- You can start preparing for college now.



# HOW?

## STRATEGIES & SUGGESTIONS

- **Stick with what works.** Your current visit program likely includes an information session, a campus tour, and possibly another activity that gives prospective students an opportunity to experience life on your campus. It's a tried and true formula, and it will work with younger students, too – with a few tweaks! Our suggestions on the next page will help you build a program that caters to younger students.



- **Make it hands on.** Shorter attention spans are better served with participatory activities.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Encourage students to respond to questions to make it more conversational and engaging.
- **Use near-peers to build relationships.** Utilize college students whenever possible.
- **Make it fun!** Build college knowledge with a game show-style format or turn your campus tour into a scavenger hunt.
- **Connect to interests and careers.** Ask about their current hobbies and future goals and connect to majors, extracurriculars, etc.
- **Relate to their school experience.** Explain how college is similar to and different from middle school and high school. For example, college students set their own schedule, so they might not have class every day.
- **Separate genders.** Reduce behavior problems by separating boys and girls.
- **Look for partnerships.** Connect with other departments on campus to help with information sessions or extra activities. Consider the Financial Aid office, Admissions, Student Services, Student Government, Athletics, or student clubs. You know your campus best—there are probably others!
- **Communicate program availability.** Provide specific details on your website about group size limits, available dates and times, and how far in advance to book visits. It's ok to limit these visits to specific times of year.
- **Clarify Student & Chaperone Expectations**  Set a student-to-chaperone ratio that you are comfortable with (many programs opt for 10:1) and send specific expectations to be reviewed.
- **Provide liability waivers and photo releases.** Check with your Risk Management office whether students need to sign liability waivers before their visits. Photo releases are needed with guardian signatures for students under 18.
- **No need to give out expensive information packets.** If you do have a budget for promotional materials, consider something small for each student like a pencil or poster.
- **Don't get discouraged.** Middle school students especially can be a tough crowd. Have a sense of humor with the group and have fun!



# HOW?

## PROGRAM FORMAT

A robust campus visit program should ideally include at least two activities – one each from two of the three categories. Brainstorm new variations to make it your own—use our planning guide to outline a tiered visit program for 7th/8th grades and 9th/10th grades.

### INFO SESSION

**Game Show.** Use Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune, Who Wants to Be A Millionaire? or any other game show to turn the info session into a competition.

#### ► SAMPLE ACTIVITY

[Southern Oregon University Trivia Game](#) 

**Student Panel.** Find college students from similar backgrounds to share their experiences and answer questions.

**Party Games.** Play 20 Questions, Charades, or BINGO using majors or other college terms.

**A Day In The Life.** Ask middle school students to describe their expectations and fears of college life. Have college students share photos or videos of a typical day.

**Engage Parents.** Provide resources specifically for parents.


### CAMPUS TOUR

**Self-Guided.** Provide chaperones with maps and information about buildings, landmarks and services for small group tours. Designate with a symbol or add a QR code to link to videos or websites with more information.

**Photo Tour.** Create a self-guided tour where students take group photos in front of key landmarks. Provide hashtags they can use on social media so you can share!

**Scavenger Hunt.** Students must follow clues to answer questions to learn more about the campus.

#### ► SAMPLE ACTIVITY

[Oregon State University “Get To Know OSU” Quest](#) 

[Photo Scavenger Hunt](#) 

**Topical Tours.** Colleges often already have art walks or history tours developed. Or, create your own, like a tour that includes locations with images of the college mascot.

### EXTRAS

**Athletics.** Arrange for groups to walk through athletic facilities or meet with a student athlete.

**Hands-on Activities.** Connect with professors or student clubs that are willing to lead an activity in a classroom, studio or lab.

#### ► SAMPLE ACTIVITY

[Reed College Research Reactor & Lab Tours](#)

**Dining Halls.** Arrange for students to eat in a dining hall, either with meal cards or their own sack lunches.

**Cultural or Athletic Events.** Encourage groups to attend when there are free events on campus that might connect with what they are studying in class.

**Get Outside.** Provide Frisbees and a grassy spot for students to soak up the college life or have a picnic.

**Whatever’s Unique.** Show off the cool thing on your campus!

# CAMPUS VISITS PLANNING GUIDE

Briefly sketch out the programs, activities and techniques that you will offer for each grade level or grouping. Consider what is developmentally appropriate for each age, and build on information from year to year.

GRADE	INFO SESSION	CAMPUS TOUR	EXTRAS
7			
8			
9			
10			





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**COLLEGE.** It's not a dream, it's a plan.