

# How to Find a School with Great Teaching



When you visit a college, you hear about the food, dorms, and sports—but what about the teaching? Great teaching is what really helps students succeed. Here’s a checklist to help you find out if a college truly puts students and their learning first in the classroom.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

### Before the Tour

- Internet Search: Check the mission, values, and strategic plan.
- Email ahead to ask to sit in on a class.
- Email ahead to talk to a professor in your major.

### Ask the Admissions Office

- Find out the average class size.
- Is there a Center for Teaching & Learning?
- What does great teaching mean here?

### Ask Your Student Tour Guide

- What kinds of teaching do you experience here?
- How big are the introductory classes and how are they set up?
- Ask students: Do classes feel meaningful and supportive?

### Ask Faculty

- How are professors hired/promoted?
- Is teaching valued in your department? At the University? & How?
- How is teaching evaluated?

# Answers to Look For

## BEFORE THE TOUR

### Check the Mission and Values

Search the website or ask:

**“Is great teaching central in the school’s mission and strategic plan? And allocation of resources?”**

**Green Flag:** Best schools center **teaching** in their long-term goals, values, and priorities. And offer resources for teaching, technology, and curriculum innovation.

**Red Flag:** *Great teaching isn’t named in the mission, vision, or strategic plan.*

### Ask to sit in on a class

**Red Flag:** *You can’t sit in on a class on tour.*

### Ask to talk to a professor

**Red Flag:** *You can’t talk to a Professor on tour.*

**What Does Excellent Teaching Look Like Here?** Look for answers that include:

#### Green Flag:

**Active Learning** – Are students doing, not just listening?

**Real-World Connections** – Is content applied to real-life problems or careers?

**Personal Relevance** – Are courses connected to students’ lives and communities?

**Belonging** – Do professors make sure every student feels seen and supported?

**Challenging** – Do courses challenge students to think deeply about the course ideas?

**Red Flag:** *If they mention class size, student-faculty ratio, or faculty research expertise, but don’t mention the teaching practices above.*

## ASK THE ADMISSIONS OFFICE

### What is the average class size?

**Green Flag:** Most classes have less than 30 students.

**Red Flag:** *If most first year classes are large and they are held in large lecture halls.*

### Is There a Center for Teaching and Learning? Ask to visit it!

**Top schools have a space for professors to grow, improve, and innovate with technology.**

- What percentage of faculty use it? [look for at least ¾ of faculty.]
- Is it centrally located?
- Is it part of the orientation process for faculty?

## ASK YOUR STUDENT TOUR GUIDE

### What Do Students Say About Their Classes? Ask your student tour guide:

**“What is teaching like here? What do faculty do in your courses?”**

- Look for the same themes: active learning, real-world connections, personal relevance, belonging, and challenging!
- Listen for good faculty-student relationships. Bonus: If they describe faculty “mentors.”
- Check that the student feels fully engaged in class—not bored.
- Pay attention to how the student talks about their peers in class—do they work collaboratively and support each other?
- Find out if the student is gaining career or leadership skills.

## What is the average intro class size and how are classes set up?

Ask your tour guide or a few students about \*their\* individual experience:

**“In your first year, how big were your classes? How are the classes set up—where do students sit and how are they organized?”**

**Green Flag:** Most classes have less than 30 students and there is a lot of discussion and interaction. Students sit in groups or there are movable chairs for different kinds of activities.

**Red Flag:** *If most first year classes are large and they are held in large lecture halls where students sit in rows and the professor stands in the front.*

**Follow up:** If the classes are in large lecture halls, how do professors get students to interact?

## Do your classes feel meaningful and supportive? Ask:

**“How do you feel when you are in class?”**

**Green Flag:** Feeling a sense of belonging, valued, community. Feeling inspired and engaged. Feeling challenged, but also supported.

**Red Flag:** *If there is a competitiveness without community among students. If they describe a “sage on the stage” where the professor has the knowledge and students are rapidly note-taking.*

## ASK FACULTY

### How Are Professors Hired and Promoted? Ask:

**“What’s more important here—teaching or research?”**

**Green Flag:** Faculty have to show strong commitment to be hired and prove great teaching to be promoted.

**Red Flag:** *If there is a high bar for research but low bar for teaching.*

### How Is Teaching Evaluated? Ask:

**“How does the university measure teaching quality?”**

**Green Flag:** Multiple measures in addition to student evaluations, like:

- Classroom observations
- Teaching portfolios
- Student success data

### Is Teaching Valued Here? Ask:

**“Is teaching valued at your university and in your department? What makes you feel teaching is/is not valued?”**





**Green Flag:** Faculty talk openly about the university supporting teaching development with resources and strong culture! They are clear that teaching matters.

**Bonus:** Ask about how they keep students engaged and how they support learning.

**Red Flag:** *They don’t give evidence that teaching matters in the faculty culture.*

**PRO TIP:** Rankings won’t tell you about teaching—but asking the right questions will. Choose the college where professors are committed to helping you succeed.



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