

Going to a college fair.....

What is a college fair?

A college fair is a gathering of college representatives. It's your chance to pick up brochures and ask questions about a variety of colleges, all in one place.

Fairs range in size, from smaller events at high schools or community centers with representatives from just a few institutions to fairs in large cities that feature hundreds of colleges and universities.

In some cases, colleges are represented by full-time admissions officers from the campuses, while other times the tables are staffed by the colleges' alumni or current students.

Some fairs also include information sessions on topics like financial aid, as well as opportunities to talk with experienced high school counselors who can advise you on the college admissions process.

Before you go to the fair

Before you go to a college fair, think about what kind of college would suit you best. The following questions will help you get started.

- Would you prefer a large university, a small college, or something in between?
- What type of setting would you like: city, suburban, small town, rural?
- Do you want to stay close to home or go some distance away?
- Are you looking for a college with a particular religious affiliation?
- What academic program(s) are of interest to you? Are you interested in a specific degree program, such as nursing or engineering?
- Do you want opportunities for study abroad?
- Is it important to you to be involved in community service? Do you want to participate in particular sports or extracurricular activities?
- Are there special services that you might need from the college, such as tutoring?

This is also a good time to gather information from people and resources around you. Talk to your counselor about your college plans. Use resource materials at the guidance office or library and on the Web to research colleges. Talk to your parents, family and friends.

Practical tips for making the most of a college fair

- Take along a pen and a small notebook. Also, take a bag to carry the brochures you pick up, unless you know that the sponsors of the fair will provide one.
- Print out some address labels with your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, high school and year of graduation. Spend your time at the college tables asking questions, not filling out contact cards!
- When you arrive, check out the floor plan and find out where the tables for your top choice colleges are located so you can go directly to them.
- Write your most important questions down in advance so you don't forget them.
- Check on whether any information sessions, such as financial aid, are being offered. Interested? Budget your time accordingly.
- Jot down notes about a college while your memory is fresh, such as right after visiting the table.
- Pick up the business cards of any representatives you talk to, so you can contact them if you have any more questions.

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Use your time wisely

The fair will be open for a limited number of hours, so plan to use your time wisely.

Make a list of the colleges that interest you the most. You'll want to make sure to stop by those tables first.

What about other colleges that you think might have potential, but don't make your top

choices list? Plan to visit those after you have gathered information from the colleges at the top of your list.

If there's still time left after that, browse around any tables that catch your eye. Sometimes a college you've never heard of has just the major or activity that you're seeking.

What to ask at the fair

You can get general information about a college or university from its Web site or from college guidebooks. If possible, gather this information ahead of time about the colleges that interest you the most. That will give you the background to dig deeper with your questions.

At the college fair, you can talk one-to-one with admissions representatives. This is your chance to go beyond the general information and ask questions that are unique to **your** interests and situation.

For example, if you are interested in majoring in biology, you could ask about the sequence of courses you would be likely to take your first year, about opportunities for students to conduct research in biology, and about what recent biology graduates are doing now.

Make a list of questions to ask about your top choice colleges. Asking each representative the same questions will help you compare different colleges. But you might also have some questions that are specific to a particular college or university.

Time will be limited, so prioritize your list to make sure you get answers to your most important questions.

Ask each admissions representative how you can contact him or her if you have any questions after the college fair.

A college fair is your chance to go beyond the general information and ask questions that are unique to **your** interests.

Questions to ask

To help you get started, here are some questions you might ask at the fair. Remember, though, to concentrate on questions that address your specific interests.

Campus life

- What percentage of students live on campus (first-year and upperclass)?
- How are roommates selected?
- What recreation facilities and student organizations are there for the activities that I enjoy?

Academics

- How do first-year students choose their classes?
- How many students will be in the classes I'm likely to take during my first year?
- How are faculty advisers assigned, especially before a major has been chosen?
- When must I choose a major?
- What is the process to apply for study abroad?
- What types of internships are there in my areas of interest? How do students find internships? Do they receive academic credit?
- What services are available on campus to help me with career planning?
- What percentage of last year's first-year students returned for their sophomore year?
- What percentage of students graduate in four years? What percentage graduate in five years?

After you get home

• Make a point of going through the materials and your notes within one week after the fair. You'll probably remember more about your conversations with college representatives while the memories from the fair are still fresh.

• Follow up with any college that interests you by contacting the admissions office to ask further questions and, if possible, plan a visit to the campus.

Campus visits

There's no substitute for seeing a college yourself!

There are lots of ways to find out about a college, from brochures to videos to college fairs.

But the bottom line is that

nothing beats the test of going to a college and seeing it for yourself.

Here are some ideas to help you make the most of a campus visit.

Before you go

Call the admissions office in advance

Just as there's no substitute for seeing a college firsthand, there's no substitute for advance planning.

When you call the admissions office, tell them the date you'd like to visit and the time of day you expect to arrive.

If you want to stay overnight in a residence hall, ask if they can make arrangements.

Also, find out about lining up an interview (if they offer them and you'd like one) or attending an information session, visiting classes and talking with faculty.

Read up on the college and think about questions

Go back through the information you've collected about the college. Check the resources at your school's guidance office and browse the college's Web site, if possible.

This research will help you

think of questions to ask and aspects of the college to explore while you're there.

The other side of this page has lists of questions to help you get started. As you think of other questions, write them down.

A campus visit is informative at any time, but it's best to see a college in action, when students are in classes.

Colleges encourage visits, but their schedules for tours, interviews and overnight stays might fill up early. Call ahead!

Have some extra time during your visit? Stop by the campus coffee shop or grill, read bulletin boards, try to strike up conversations with students, or go to a play or lecture.

Nervous about the interview? That's natural. Try to look at it as a conversation in which you ask questions, too. You'll be more likely to relax, be yourself and enjoy it.

While you're there

Talk to as many students as you can

Once you're on campus, try to take advantage of a variety of ways to learn about the college:

- Meet with an admissions officer or attend an information session
- Take a tour of the campus
- Sit in on a class

- Have a meal in the cafeteria
- Pick up copies of the student newspaper and alumni magazine.

Throughout your visit, talk to as many students as you can and don't be bashful about asking questions!

Prepare for the interview

If you have scheduled an interview, take along your list of questions, so you're sure to cover everything you wanted to find out.

You'll probably be asked about your academic background,

interests, hobbies, goals and why you're interested in the college, so be ready to talk about that.

As with any interview, be on time, or call ahead if you know you'll be delayed.

Take time to look around on your own

Take some time to explore the campus on your own and absorb the atmosphere. While

organized activities can give you information you can't get on your own, the reverse is true, too.

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Lots and lots of ????

You've probably already thought of lots of questions to ask during your campus visit.

Here are some suggestions, but be sure to ask the questions that are important to YOU.

When you talk to students, ask . . .

1. How many hours a week do you study? Is that typical here?
2. Are faculty members interested in students and accessible outside of class?
3. Do many students go home on weekends?
4. Are the athletic facilities open to all students or only to athletes?
5. Is it possible to study in your dorm room?
6. Is the food good?
7. Are campus jobs readily available?
8. Is there easy access to computers? Where are they located?
9. What's the library like as a place to study? to do research?
10. What do you like most about this college? least?
11. How easy is it to get the classes you want?
12. If you could change something about this school, what would it be?

If you attend a class, ask yourself . . .

1. Are students prepared for the class? Do they seem interested in the material?
2. Do I feel that the students are learning—either new facts or new ways of thinking about a subject?
3. Is there time for questions and discussion? Do students participate?
4. Am I intellectually challenged by what is taking place in the class?
5. Is there good rapport between professors and students?

As you tour the campus, ask yourself . . .

1. Are the buildings in good repair? the grounds well-kept?
2. Are the residence halls pleasant and quiet enough to study in? Are there laundry and kitchen facilities?
3. What's the cafeteria like?
4. Are computers and lab equipment up-to-date and plentiful?
5. What's the surrounding town or city like?

In an interview or information session, you could ask . . .

1. Does the college have academic programs that fit my interests?
2. Where are computer terminals located? Will I have to pay extra for computer time?
3. Will I have access to special equipment (such as an electron microscope) as a first-year student?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the college's advising system?
5. How many students will there be in courses I'm likely to take in my first year? Are those courses taught by professors or graduate assistants?
6. What kinds of campus jobs are available for first-year students?
7. Will there be any new programs or facilities in the next two years?
8. What are the college's recent graduates doing now?

After the visit

Write down your impressions

1. Were the people you met friendly? Did they answer your questions fully and candidly?
2. What do you think of the quality of instruction and the academic atmosphere?
3. Were the students the kind of people you'd like to get to know?
4. Did you like the social atmosphere?
5. Would you like to spend more time there?

People's views about a college or university can vary widely, so try to talk with as many people as possible.

Write down your questions so you'll remember them and can refer to them during your visit.

As you tour the campus and talk with people, ask yourself whether this is a place where you'd feel comfortable and able to learn and do your best.

Are you interested in any extra-curricular activities? If so, ask about them and try to see the facilities.

If possible, write down your impressions of the college while they're still fresh in your mind.