

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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This *College Guide* handout is published by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (www.acm.edu).

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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.