

Maximizing Your College Fair Experience



When entering a college fair environment, your senses are bombarded with beautiful displays and handouts, freebies of all shapes and sizes, many, many people and the emotional blend of excitement and anxiety about the future.

- Early high school students and families can gain a perspective on future opportunities through materials and conversations.
- Juniors and Seniors can obtain more specific advice and insights for making important future decisions and on their personal admissions applications.

Key points to keep in mind as you prepare to get the most out of any college fair:

Advanced preparation: Review the list and research online the schools attending the fair, particularly unfamiliar schools to see if you are interested.

- Do they have the major(s) you are considering?
- Have you made any decisions on size or type of institution you want, special programs you want to participate in, what are your location preferences, and do they fit your criteria?
- If you haven't considered any of these questions, you should! They can help you narrow your focus from thousands of higher education institutions to the more manageable 10-20 that you initially will consider more fully and the final group to which you ultimately apply.
- Prioritize the list of schools you want to speak with, but be open to new ones added at the last minute and any that draw you in by their presentation and literature.

Your goal at the fair is to gain information not readily available and to make a personal contact.

From the Student's Perspective: This can be an intimidating experience the first time, particularly for more shy students. The admissions reps are there to talk to YOU! They want to tell you about their school and programs and to answer your questions. Be prepared to ask questions, and it's okay to have them written out! The more focused you are and the more specific questions you have, the more detailed information you will gain. A great open-ended starter question is: "Tell me about your school, the special programs you offer and your major in X." Try not to ask questions readily answered in the literature they provide or online.

For students who are targeting a specific school or program, two great questions to ask are: "What are some characteristics of successful students at your school/major/program?" or "How do you work with home-schooled students?" Some have home-schooling admissions events, special admissions processing procedures or even a particular person assigned to home-schooled applicants. Learn about these to help you best prepare.

Be prepared to talk about yourself. They want to know if you have any majors in mind or if you have special talents/activities/experiences that make you a great candidate. These topics can also be a way to talk about some of the activities and experiences offered by their school. They may also want to understand your academic record, so you might talk about your SAT/ACT scores, your GPA or any special academics you've pursued. While it's not an official interview and you may only spend a few minutes with them, they are gaining insight into the type of applicant you are and the depth of your interest.

Finally, Look your best and make eye contact!

From the Parents' perspective: Schools understand that there are usually three huge questions on parents' minds:

- Is this a positive environment where my student will grow and be "safe" (academically, physically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally?)
- Is there help available for paying for this huge investment?
- Will my student be able to find solid employment when they graduate from your program?
- (These are all questions students should be considering, too!)

You should feel very comfortable asking questions about these issues. They may refer you to documentation and statistics on placement, financial aid, etc., but this is what you need.

From the Admissions Rep's perspective: There is such a thing as "college fair season", and this may be the fifth fair they've attended in a week, seeing hundreds of students and families at each fair. Sometimes you will speak with area alumni, but you may be speaking with someone who will be reviewing your application when it arrives!

- Be truly interested. Some colleges track number of contacts.
- Don't grab the freebies without any conversation.
- You will want to provide your information, so write legibly and completely.
- Some students opt to bring pre-printed labels which saves time. Be sure to pre-register and use the student barcode technology for providing information quickly. This saves both you and the admissions rep. so much time!
More info in on the ODA website: <https://www.onedayacademy.com/college-fair>.
- It is recommended that you take notes and then follow-up with those schools of interest.

With these points in mind, enjoy your time at the fair learning about new possibilities for your future, and plan to visit your top choices!

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