

Do's and Don'ts... for Attending College Fairs

College fair events are a lot like scavenger hunts. They are opportunities to meet and interact with new people, to demonstrate confidence, to search for information and if you'll forgive the extended analogy, they are a chance for you to find clues. Clues to what your future might be like in college, what it *could* be like in college, clues about your passions, your interests, and clues about your priorities. They are a chance for you to begin relationships with the people who are likely to review your application credentials and they are a prime information gathering tool of your college search. All of this is to say nothing of the fact that they can be a whole lot of fun. The following are some good tips and advice for preparing to attend a college fair:

DO...

- ✓ **Look sharp.** You only get one shot to make a first impression. This is not the night for jeans and athletic gear. A jacket and tie (or the female equivalent) is not too formal and shows you understand the importance of your participation in the program.
- ✓ **Introduce yourself.** Tell the admission representative what school you attend, what grade you are in, and something you have an interest in knowing more about.
- ✓ **Take initiative in conversation.** Don't wait for the admission person to greet you.
- ✓ **Demonstrate maturity and confidence, in all ways.** It goes a long way.
- ✓ **Offer a firm hand shake and look the admission representative in the eyes.** These physical signs indicate that you are engaged and interested in what the admission person has to say. They are also further demonstrations of your confidence.
- ✓ **Research ahead of time.** If you are visiting the table of specific college you already know something about, prepare a question which pertains specifically to the school of interest and NOT to every other college the room.

- ✓ **Print address labels ahead of time.** College representatives will be eager to add you to their mailing lists. Having labels will shorten the amount of inquiry card writing you need to do and allow you to explore more schools. Include your name, school, year of graduation, home address, email address, phone number and main area of interest. Note: Some larger college fairs will electronically scan and track your registration information.
- ✓ **Send thank you notes and, or follow up questions** to those representatives with whom you had meaningful conversation. These interactions should begin ongoing relationships.
- ✓ **Get organized prior to attending.** Prepare questions ahead of time. Aren't yet familiar with a school? Consider the following:
 - Ask questions about culture, strengths, student outcomes and research opportunities.
 - Ask about who is happiest and about the kind of student who would not find a home at the school.
 - Ask the representative to share his or her favorite anecdote regarding a student and or faculty experience on the campus.
 - Ask the representative to share one or two of the campus's traditions.
 - Ask the representative about formal visit opportunities and interview options on and off campus.

DON'T...

- ✓ **Ask, "Does your college have a 'good' insert-any-discipline-of-interest, major?"** That question will never net you an answer which helps you and you can seek information regarding available programs in a variety of on-line and print resources.
- ✓ **Ask, "What are your most popular majors?"** This is a generic question and is seen as "filler". Instead focus on questions which require the admission representative to share a subjective opinion or perspective.
- ✓ **Ask questions which have obvious answers that could be found online.**

- ✓ **Be flippant or sarcastic.** You can't know an admission representative's sense of humor in the short time you will have with him or her. Avoid jokes, references to political and religious beliefs, and never risk offending someone outright.
- ✓ **Be too humble.** This is an appropriate time to share an achievement of which you are proud. If there is an opening in conversation and no other students waiting for the representative's time, let the admission person know why you think your strengths might make you a good fit for the school.
- ✓ **Visit a college booth without an opening greeting and closing statement in mind.** Be prepared and look prepared.
- ✓ **Hobnob with your friends** for an extended period of time while in the fair area. If you do, you risk wasting the college fair opportunity and appear disinterested in the process. Remember, these representatives have traveled a long way to be here. Demonstrate appreciation for their time and the chance to greet them in person. Debrief with friends about your day and, or who won the game, AFTER the college fair is over.
- ✓ **Let your parents do all the talking.** This is *your* college search. Mom and dad will be your fiercest advocates and pillars of support. They'll also have great questions of their own. But (and it is a big "but"), they won't ultimately be the applicant. Consider separating from your parents at the event. Visit schools of interest separately. Discussing what you each find may be even more fun when you have had the chance to explore independent of each other.
- ✓ **Attend and then drop all of the information you collect in a file cabinet (or worse, the trash).** Review it, discuss it with your family, discuss it with your college counselor. Consider the event one of many research steps you'll employ during your college journey. Make the time count.