



SEATTLE ACADEMY

OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

COLLEGE FAIR SUGGESTIONS BY GRADE LEVEL

COLLEGE ADVISING

The first time attending a college fair might be an overwhelming experience. The energy in the room, the competing interests of family members, and the mix of attendee purposes may generate mixed feelings in you or in your family. Fortunately, the following suggestions can turn a disorienting event into a productive, interesting, and fun one. Remember that college representatives *actually like students* and appreciate thoughtful questions. See below for suggestions.

Purpose of fair: All students

- For students of any grade level, demonstrating interest by checking in with representatives, providing contact information, and/or asking sincere questions is always a good idea. Always provide a college with contact information if the representative has a system (a contact card, usually) for doing so. Bringing along address-labels can make this a speedy process. Do provide email and phone contacts that you actually check regularly and create a system for sorting out emails necessitating responses (invitations to events in Seattle or interviews).

Purpose of fair: Juniors and younger

- The college fair can be good “one-stop shopping” to investigate a diverse set of colleges. In the end, we’ll insist that you apply to a range of colleges, differing in geography, selectivity, size, personality, and so on. Your exploration at the fair should reflect this. Remain open to lots of possibilities, not only those places of which you’ve heard, or those places that match an early, narrow set of criteria. We’ll work with you to expand that list of criteria soon enough, so exposure to a mix of options at the fair can be a great introduction.

Purpose of fair: Seniors

- For seniors, the purpose of a college fair is to check in with colleges to which you intend to apply and check in with a few others that might remain contenders. Senior activity at the college fair is fairly straightforward: approaching the tables of college where you plan to apply, shaking the hands of reps, indicating that you’re applying, and filling out contact cards.

Notes and plan for accompanying family members

- Set aside one brief “team meeting” pre-fair where you set a couple of goals as parents and a couple of goals as students. Keep it simple. For younger students, the goal might be that each family attendee picks up a brochure of interest from 2-3 colleges, or that each makes a point of picking up a brochure from an unexpected location or from a college that represents a new and unexpected find. For seniors, the goal might be that the student approach the rep at each of the schools now firmly on the college list and indicate interest in applying.
- Divide and conquer! Families need not traverse college fairs together, and at busier fairs, traveling in packs can make for a less efficiency. Perhaps one family member takes the first half of the alphabet and the other the second, agreeing to compare notes for a fixed amount of time afterward. In talking to college representatives, parents should avoid language such as “We are interested in applying to…” or “We are taking calculus this year.” The student is the applicant, and independence is important to both the process and to admission people.
- Parents, remember that your enthusiasm for a particular college or colleges *can* have the reverse effect on students. This phenomenon isn’t unique to you or your family; it’s completely normal. Remember that there are times in this process where it’s a good idea to balance open communication with a bit of a “poker face” about school preferences!
- Don’t talk about the fair ad nauseam before and after. Whether apparent or not, too much constant college talk can become really exhausting and counter-productive for everyone involved. Identify when family members are over-processing colleges out of nervousness and give permission to everyone to take a break from the discussion.

Questions college representatives get tired of answering at college fairs (we know, we’ve been there)

Remember, college representatives love talking to students and their families. Frustrating questions, however, are those that result in premature or naïve elimination of many colleges that are truly excellent options. Remember, very few colleges in the country meet the “medium sized, sunny, and urban, with interesting kids and school spirit” criteria that many well-intentioned students begin the process by seeking. Keep an open mind and show creativity in your questions to representatives (see subsequent section).

- “Tell me about your college.” For most (somewhat road-weary) college representatives, this is already an exhausting and direction-less beginning to the conversation. (Don’t worry; we’ll suggest more effective questions in the next section!)

- “How is your program in X?” Truthfully, no rep is going to answer this in the negative unless they just plain don’t offer an architecture program, for example. This is also a question that is difficult to answer in the compressed time of the fair, one that might be answered more effectively close to the conclusion of the process when students are making last decisions and when major interests are a lot more fixed (subject interests change a great deal in the eighteen months of the college process, so don’t eliminate colleges on major alone).
- Questions that could be very easily answered with a thirty second look at the brochure the college is distributing. Usually, questions such as “How large is your college?” or “Where are you located?” are used to eliminate options too early in the process, when the goal should be an expansive list of schools, not a restrictive one. Remember that desires for college size, programs, locations, and so on, can change dramatically as students continue to develop. Instead, grab the materials, investigate more deeply off-site, and start to build an archive of college information.
- “How is your weather?” (Another question sometimes used to dismiss certain schools too early in the process.)
- “Hmm... so you’re a *liberal arts college*...” (More of a statement than a question, but sometimes the implication is that liberal arts colleges don’t “do science” when the very definition of liberal arts is educating students broadly.)
- “What is your average GPA?” The answer to this question, at all colleges, is a moving target. Colleges calculate GPA differently, and most read holistically such that many factors determine the admission decision, including grade trend, course selection, favorite involvements, and so on.
- “Do you have financial aid?” (Generally, yes.)
- “Can I have this pen?”
- “Did you attend this college?” (Here’s a tip: Representatives who did *not* attend sometimes have more objective viewpoints.)
- When asked about college fairs recently, a number of our former and current college representative friends agreed that the bigger issue at a college fair is students whose clothing is so *abbreviated* that leaning over to fill out paperwork at the tables creates a negative, and unintended, impression. Dressing like yourself is encouraged. Barely dressing at all is not.

Effective questions for college representatives:

Asking a couple of these of a college fair representative can result in a more satisfying and productive conversation on both sides. Note that if the fair is extremely busy, *one should not ask every single question below* of every rep. Give some space to other attendees (you’ll be grateful for it when it’s your turn to ask questions), but also listen to the answers others receive. Often, you’ll hear information of interest to you, too.

Two ways to start:

- “Hi, I’m [name]. How are you doing?” (a refreshing start for a college representative!)
- “I’m considering attending [name of school]. Are there a couple of features that set your college apart from others?”
- Seniors especially: “I’m definitely applying to [name of school]. I’ve done my homework, and have a few follow-up questions.”

More possible questions:

- “How would you describe your student body’s personality?”
- “How is this school distinctive among its peer schools or among schools in general?”
- “When are the enrollment deadlines? Is it wise to apply to your school even earlier than those deadlines or is there no advantage at all?”
- “Are there minimum SATs for admission in general, for certain programs, and/or for scholarships?”
- “Are SAT II exams used in the admission process, and if so, how?”
- “May I have a list of majors to take with me?”
- “Will you be reviewing admission applications, and if so, are there a few key features for which you look?”
- “What are the general trends [intention to go, subject areas pursued, timing of enrollment] toward graduate school among your alumni?”
- “What accommodations do you offer for students with physical disabilities or learning differences?”
- “Is tutoring available for all students, if so, is it free?”
- “What is the biggest student complaint among students you hear currently? What hot issues are covered in the student newspaper?”
- “How would you characterize first year classes in terms of size and style? Is that true for most majors?”
- “Can I have a business card with your direct phone number, or would you rather I contact the college a different way?”
- “Do you offer student housing, and if so, for how long? Is it common or encouraged for students to bring cars?”
- “Are there unique requirements [forms, deadlines] in your college’s financial aid process and/or additional scholarships about which I should know? Are some of those scholarships automatically awarded, versus others that require additional applications?”
- “Is double-majoring common or difficult? Are there combinations of majors that are notoriously challenging? If I apply indicating an interest in one major, what is the process for changing majors and is that change generally possible?”
- “Do students commonly work on campus and is work open only to work study awardees?”
- “What percentage of students return for their second year?”
- “Are there a few campus traditions that are favorites with students?”
- While availability of Hillel or other religious organizations may not make or break some students’ final college decision, you can ask questions about religious life such as, “How would you characterize religious involvement of students who identify as [faith]. Would you say they are active beyond the major holidays and in what ways?”
- The same holds for other beliefs. “How would you characterize political awareness or activism on campus?” or “How diverse or surprising are the politics on campus?” or “Are there certain topics that would get me ‘booed’ out of class or out of the dining hall?”