A FAIR WAY TO LEARN

Who to see, what to do, what to say, what you can gain from the Big Apple College Fair this weekend

By ERIKA PRAEFER

ITH over 160 colleges represented at this weekend's Big Apple College Fairs, prospective students have a golden opportunity to visit with a variety of admissions counselors and gather valuable first-hand information on their establishment's college-related locations.

It's important to make the most of these visits — and to make a good impression. We've asked admissions reps from exhibiting schools for their top tips on what impresses them most, as well as their biggest pet peeves.

CHRISTINE MURPHY
Assistant vice president of admissions, Adelphi University

"Due to the limited time you'll have at the fair, a little advance research is advisable — it can be overwhelming if you're not prepared. Ideally, you should spend time with a guidance counselor prior to the event as well to learn what location and size school most interests you, which academic program, major, niche or joint degree programs exist at certain schools, admissions criteria, the costs and scholarship information. You need to know your reach schools, mid-reach and schools you're likely to gain admission to."

"Ask an admissions representative for his business card to begin a working relationship. This person is probably the person responsible for admissions in your region. Ask informed questions about the school. Talk about visiting an open house, which is typically the next step after a college fair. In your exchange with admissions reps, you should have practiced three to four points about yourself (that) cover your interests and your academic needs."

"Parents play an important role in the college search and often accompany students to the fair. However, sometimes anxiety is created over who is controlling the conversation with reps. This doesn't leave a favorable impression, nor is it conducive to a productive discussion. Ask questions in a coordinated way — students should lead the questions. If it's too busy to speak to an admissions rep, you may want to think about stopping back. The first hour can be really busy, but by the end of the day, things slow down. It could make a favorable impression if you returned a second time."

DEIRDRE WHITMAN
Vice president of enrollment management, Mercy College

"You only have one chance to make a first impression. Communication skills are important — look an admissions rep in the eye, shake their hand and keep a disposition that is professional and interested. Be able to identify your greatest strengths."

As for attire, "I would recommend casual business attire. For guys, a shirt with a collar, and ladies, a skirt or dress — something that looks put-together. Put your best foot forward. The competition for students is very real."

"We're looking for quality applications — not only students who succeed academically, but who contribute to the spirit of the campus community. Well-roundedness, leadership positions within high school, global perspective, community service projects of all kinds, student government and athletics (high school and community-based) are what we're looking for. Students who can handle academics, multi-task and are involved in developing skills outside of the classroom have a strong likelihood for success."

"Prior to the fair, research what kind of school you're going to. Large, small, private or public? Do you want a huge lecture hall with graduate assistants teaching class? Small classes with professors? Are athletics important to you? Be honest with yourself. Are certain schools a real stretch academically? Make your list before walking in the room to know who you want to talk to.

AMANDA PRESS
Associate director of admissions, New York Institute of Technology (Old Westbury and New York City Campuses)

"Do your research first. It's a large arena and you can get lost otherwise. Narrow down the tables you'd like to visit by the college you'd like to pursue. Look at schools that offer programs you're interested in. Make a list, or it can feel like you're going to a department store without knowing what you're looking for."

"New York Institute of Technology is obviously known for our engineering and architecture programs and combined medical degrees (physical therapy, physician's assistant, occupational therapy, combined osteopathic medicine). Students who are career-focused should ask what it takes to get accepted into these specific programs."

"When considering NYIT's tuition cost of $29,700 per year, 'Ask about what scholarships are offered and how to become eligible for grants. Find out when to fill out your FAFSA (student loan) forms.'"

DR. BEN CORPUS
Vice president for student affairs and enrollment management, Baruch College

"Before you attend a fair, you should do some soul-searching and decide what type of college you want to attend, what you want to study, and the geographic location(s) of where you want to go to school. Most certainly you should be thoughtful of a college's affordability. However, you should also leave your options open as you meet college counselors."

"If you have no short list of target colleges yet, 'Identify about 10 to 20 colleges that range from a reach college to a safe college. Be sure they offer your intended major, if you have one.'"

"When speaking with admissions reps, your first point should be a warm and professional introduction of yourself to the college rep — try to jot down your name. Make a personal connection and then dive into your questions. While questions related to academic programs, the campus experience, scholarship opportunities, and co-curricular activities are what may be expected, open-ended questions can provide a more meaningful response that reveals a richer flavor of the college."

These include: "How do you know students are academically challenged on your campus? What are the top two things recent graduates have said that you are doing well or would like to improve?"

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