



THINGS TO DO BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A COLLEGE FAIR

Note to Parents-

The following three pages can be given directly to your teen to work through independently, though because a college fair is likely one of the first events of a college admissions process, best practice is to discuss and work through the items together.

A college fair should be a low stress and low stakes event for the teen to take the lead on preparation, conversing with adults, and seeking information in a challenging, i.e., potentially crowded, chaotic, or intimidating, environment. Absolutely appropriate for a parent to attend a college fair, but empower and encourage, don't hover. If you walk around the fair with your teen stay in the background when it comes time to approach a table or specifically a representative of a college your teen is interested in.

There are few questions that must be asked and answered in the moment, particularly at a college fair, so this is a great opportunity to encourage your teen to take the lead. A fundamental principle for the college search process is that this is your TEEN'S process, not yours. Parents should absolutely provide support, information, guidance, and an occasional kick in the re for ut **your teen needs to lead the process in order to own the outcome.**

The best ways for a parent to help before, during, and after a college fair are:

- Unlike a campus visit, a college fair is low stakes enough to support your teen attending on their own, though going together is HIGHLY recommended. Even if you (the parent) are attending information sessions or reading a book in the lobby most of the time, you are demonstrating your commitment to the process, you can be a sounding board for your teen in real time, and you are showing your teen you believe in their ability to lead the process. Be there, but resist the urge to hover.
- Review online details of the event and the checklist on the following pages, help your teen create a plan, and role play conversations your teen may have during the event.
- If time allows, encourage your teen to research colleges ahead of time and to think about early criteria for where they'd like to attend college.
- Allow and encourage your teen to voice their opinion first when debriefing their experiences at a college fair- your opinion, even if strong, should be tempered; focus on listening more than speaking.
- Ensure a debrief discussion, editing of notes, sorting and categorizing materials from the fair, and follow-up correspondence is complete as soon as possible after the event.
- Ask your teen what you could have done, or done differently, to help them before, during, or after the fair.
- Use a college fair as a good test run for future college visits by practicing roles and responsibilities, communication styles, and offering and receiving feedback to/from each other.

BEFORE THE COLLEGE FAIR:

- Parent and Teen- Review the college fair's website for times, including information session schedule and topics, which institutions will be represented, and any suggestions for attendees.
 - Discuss objectives for time at the fair- this could vary based primarily on teen's grade level.
 - Decide whether teen should register or not- pros and cons depending on grade level.
 - If not done previously, teen consider and write down general college interests, including:
 - location- geography/area of country and urban/suburban/rural
 - possible majors or minors
 - type- e.g., liberal arts, state universities, research, technical, etc.
 - size
 - extracurricular or other strong interests, e.g., study abroad, ROTC, Greek life, etc.
 - If time allows, research college/university attendee websites and select 3 or more which fit your initial criteria.
 - Review information session topics and schedule.
- Discuss roles and responsibilities- parents should be in the background or even not in the main area at all depending on the teen's age and comfort level; see additional notes on page 1.
- If not done previously, teen should create a professional email address for the college admissions process, including to use at the fair.
- Teen practice or role play with a parent- greeting a representative, listening reflectively, asking questions, taking notes, presenting themselves as polite and engaging, talking about what they are interested in in a college and about their own interests and abilities, and asking for contact information.
- Make a list of questions or consider some of these.
 - Ask, or note, who you are talking to, their background and role at the college/university.
 - What makes your college unique?
 - What do students like most about your school? What do they like least or seem to complain about the most?
 - What are the top majors or programs?
 - Please tell me about the local area [surrounding the college].
 - What percentage of classes are taught by TA's [Teaching Assistants]?
 - Are some classes difficult to get into? If so, under what circumstances are they difficult? [required classes for particular majors, electives, year of study, etc.]
 - What are your study abroad or off-campus options and what percentage of students study abroad or off-campus?
 - What career counseling services are available, including internships and job placement?
 - What are the housing options and percentage of undergrads who live on campus (all years)?

JUST PRIOR TO THE COLLEGE FAIR:

- Parent and Teen- Finalize the plan, including attending information sessions, particular colleges of interest, and roles and responsibilities, but don't be afraid to deviate once you arrive.
- Plan for what to wear- teen does NOT need to dress formally, but should be well-groomed and neat, even if wearing jeans.
- Prep a spiral notebook, pens, and tote bag for all of the written material you will be given. Parents, also bring a notebook and pens, and reading material if/when you are waiting for your teen.

AT THE COLLEGE FAIR:

- Give yourselves plenty of time to park and walk in, particularly if at a convention center and/or you are arriving just prior to an information session. The most popular sessions fill fast, so arrive early if possible.
- Take a few minutes when you first arrive to orient yourself, review the map, colleges you (teen) wish to visit with, and information session locations (probably the parent).
- Plan a time and location to meet in 45-60 minutes.
 - You will probably not be finished, but this will be a nice break to check-in, jot down more notes, and re-prioritize if necessary.
- Teen, prioritize any top choice schools, and share your contact information either through your registration card or by filling in a card at the college's table.
 - Ensure you ask for the name and contact information of anyone you speak to at your top choice schools.
 - Try to fill in notes, impressions, or follow-up questions in between visiting each college table/area or during the check-in time with your parent.
- Take time to visit with 1-3 schools you've never heard of or maybe you've heard of but know little about.
- Questions NOT to ask...
 - What are my chances of getting in?
 - What are my chances for financial aid and how much can I expect?

AFTER THE COLLEGE FAIR:

- Complete and review notes.
 - What colleges stood out and why?
 - What colleges can you eliminate?
 - What colleges would you like to learn more about and/or visit?
- Sort materials collected at the fair and either recycle or file in “Interested”, “Maybe”, “Doubtful” folders (or similar).
- Soon after the fair, if possible, parent and teen discuss the event/experience, including the same questions from above, e.g., what colleges stood out and why, etc., plus:
 - How did the division of labor before and during the event go?
 - How comfortable was the teen speaking with strangers? (don't worry if it didn't go so well...it will get better with practice!)
 - Any follow up questions or particular representatives you'd (teen) like to thank? A quick, professional email is acceptable, or an actual thank you card. If this is teen's first experience with writing professional emails, the parent can/should proofread and offer suggestions, but NOT write it themselves or make it sound like a parent.
- Take note of further research and commit to a timeline for next steps.
- Update college search list or spreadsheet if/as applicable. If you (teen) haven't starting keeping track of college criteria and options, no time like the present!