

- Have a guidebook/directory for families when they arrive. List each school and its location at the fair. Be sure to point out if a particular school is in its own room. Give a detailed description of each school, including size, location, religious affiliation (if any), most popular majors and mid-50 percent admission test. Distribute a list of suggested questions for the students and families to ask of the reps (you can use **Handout 3E**).
- Provide an evaluation form so that college reps, students and families can give you feedback to use in planning the next fair.

A handout can help your students prepare for the fair. See **Handout 3F**: *How to get the most out of a college fair: Tips for students from the Associated Colleges of the Midwest*.

Organizing a presentation on college majors

“Major Mania” is a program created by the counselors at Plano West Senior High School (Plano, Texas) to help students and parents get a better understanding of college majors. The program, held annually in the fall, begins with a 30-minute general assembly presentation covering the basics of selecting a major. After that, there are two breakout sessions, each 20 to 25 minutes long, with a five-minute break between them. This schedule gives students and parents the opportunity to attend presentations on two majors. Department heads from several universities are invited to give a presentation about the major.

Presentations about each major cover the following information:

- academic strengths needed for success in the area of study
- a list of courses required in the first two years of a typical program — such as general education courses and prerequisites for the major
- the kinds of jobs the major frequently leads to, and with which types of companies or other employers (including government agencies) it is associated
- employment forecast for graduates in the area of study
- the variety of career paths that graduates in the major can pursue
- personal experiences of the presenter that would be helpful to a student considering this major

TIP

“I remind students that **they don’t have to know their major** when they’re applying to colleges. For many students it’s too much pressure to make that decision while still in high school. I encourage those students to go to college with an open mind—take a variety of classes, explore their interests”

— **Missie Heady**, West Jessamine High School, Kentucky

Pat Clipp, director of guidance at Plano West, offers these tips for schools that might conduct similar events:

- Survey students to find out the majors in which they are most interested. Include others that students may be interested in but haven't considered.
- Research colleges in your area to determine which ones have programs for the majors you would like to include.
- Include community colleges. They have excellent programs.
- Query department heads at least six months before the program. Provide them with the type of information (listed above) to include in the presentation. Let them know how often they will be giving their presentations during the evening.
- Determine the audiovisual requirements three months in advance.
- If possible, open the program to the families of ninth- and 10th-graders as well. This will give them a head start on picking the right major and will help them choose high school courses wisely.
- Prepare students by giving them a list of appropriate questions to ask the presenters.
- Have students sign in at each session they attend to determine which majors attract the most interest.
- Survey students, parents and presenters for their feedback.

Creating newsletters and handbooks

Many schools create handbooks and newsletters (print or online) as a means of informing students about college choice and college planning activities. A typical handbook includes:

- Information on the counselors and others in the counseling office and how to work with them.
- A timetable for the college-choice process.
- General college-choice information (how to research colleges).
- College preparation: minimum requirements, requirements at selective colleges.

TIP

"I use '**peer college counselors**' to get college information out. I train juniors and seniors to help in this capacity. Teachers are willing to let them make announcements in class. When kids hear information from other kids, they take it seriously."

— **Eileen Doctorow**,
North Hollywood High School,
California

TIP

"Our counseling department uses **Twitter and our school's website**, which has many links to relevant websites that can help guide students through the college search process."

— **Frank Coenraad and Barbara Conant**, Juneau SD,
Juneau-Douglas High School,
Alaska

TIP

“We publish a **guidance newsletter** each marking period. A four-page newsletter may not look as if it requires much effort, but you need to start several weeks before your deadline. I try to line up volunteer parents to fold and mail it. Bulk mailing is the way to go if money is tight, but you will get fewer complaints about delays if you can mail it first-class. Moorestown was already communicating very effectively with email and a Website, so I wasn’t sure they’d want a newsletter. As it turns out, **parents love it**. They put it on their refrigerators and find it pretty useful.”

— **William Yarwood**,
Moorestown High School,
New Jersey

- College admission policies: in general and for colleges frequently attended by your students.
- College testing information.
- Financial aid: explanation of need and of types of aid (scholarships, loans, work-study programs).
- Key resources: useful Websites and books.

Handbooks are updated annually; most run between 30 and 60 pages. Some schools prepare handbooks on special topics, including:

- Advice for student athletes.
- Services for students with special needs (e.g., learning disabilities).
- Parent information.
- The college interview.
- Applying to highly selective colleges.
- The transition to college.

Many counseling offices also issue newsletters. Some are geared to students, others to parents. Newsletters are usually emailed or posted on the school’s website; but often it is better to reach parents through regular mail. A typical newsletter is two to eight pages and covers topics such as:

- Important upcoming events.
- Local scholarship information and deadlines.
- Detailed information on tests and test preparation.
- Dates and times of visits from college reps.
- Dates and times of local college and financial aid events.
- Information on avoiding scholarship scams.
- Tips for preparing a high school résumé (list of activities, interests and special circumstances).
- Tips for preparing the personal essay or statement.
- Guidelines on planning college visits.
- Deadlines for key points in the application process (e.g., when requests for recommendations must be in the counseling office).
- National and school award announcements.
- Recognition of outstanding student achievement.

- Summer programs, camps, internships.
- News about outstanding alums or kids in college.

If your guidance office has limited resources (time, money), consider piggybacking college counseling information on the school's general newsletter or working with another department that issues newsletters.

You can also distribute handouts on these topics.

Advising students on “fit”

If possible, talk with your students about the importance of finding a college that is right *for them*, where the goals and personality of the student are well matched with those of the college.

Although there are probably many colleges that a student would find acceptable, applicants who think first about who they are and what they want from college are more likely to choose a school that is right for them. Counselors should discourage students from creating lists of colleges that their parents or friends attended, or that the publishers of college directories deem the best. The most important thing you should convey to students is that they need to reflect on who they are and what their goals are.

About rankings: Help your students understand that those who rank colleges use certain criteria — endowment, student-faculty ratio, admit rate and other measurable factors. But these factors may have little or no significance to an individual student. Students should realize that no ranked list of colleges can indicate which college is best for them. (See “What counselors say about college rankings” on page 3-13.)

Experienced counselor Dorothy Coppock develops an awareness of her students' goals this way:

“First I ask students what is important to them — major, activities, types of students they want to be with, what they've enjoyed. The key thing is to start the discussion with what *interests them* — instead of starting the discussion with colleges. I usually ask an open-ended question about their parents' education in order to get a sense of the family's expectations.

TIP

“If you give students a **list of useful websites**, be sure to devote some time each summer to updating that list. Not only will many sites have new Web addresses and new features, but **some sites go from good to bad**, and you will not want to direct your students to those. It takes another counselor and me many hours during the summer to update our list of websites.”

— **Kathy Dingler**, *Rich East High School, Illinois*

TIP

“When choosing a college, students should not ignore **geographic fit**. Can they really live in the northwest, where it rains nearly every day? Or in the northeast in the snow? In Chicago’s wind and cold? Or in the Texas heat? Geography is a legitimate consideration.”

— **Kathy Gregg**, *Westwood High School, Texas*

TIP

“Of course, the Web is the primary source of research into colleges. But students and parents need to be warned against **unreliable websites** that ask for fees and personal information. BEWARE OF SCAMS! I recommend only reliable sources and links on official college websites. The Department of Education’s College Navigator is a great resource.”

— **Lisa Brittain** and **Loyce Engel**, *Leander ISD, Texas*

“I spend a whole period having this conversation. I insist on meeting first with the student alone, no parents. Then I send a letter to parents saying that I’ve met with their child and this is what she said was important to her.”

Several handouts are designed to help students think carefully about their long-term plans and their dreams, and to assist them in choosing the college that will best help them achieve their goals. See **Handout 3E**: *Questions to ask college representatives*; **Handout 3G**: *How to make the most of a college interview*; **Handout 3H**: *College questionnaire for students*; and **Handout 3I**: *Assessing your list of colleges*.

My College QuickStart™

My College QuickStart™ is an online college and career planning kit available free of charge to all students who take the PSAT/NMSQT. It is powered by their responses to the test and provides personalized information that helps students take their next steps toward college:

- My Online Score Report
- My SAT Study Plan™
- My College Matches
- My Major & Career Matches

College questionnaire for students

Name of student: _____

1. Do you want to be:
 - able to come home in an hour or so every weekend?
 - able to come home in a half-day's drive?
 - able to come home only on vacations?

2. Do you have a geographical preference?
 - Southeast Northwest
 - Southwest Midwest
 - West Coast Northeast

3. Do you prefer certain states? If so, list them.

4. Which do you prefer? Large city Suburb Small town

5. Do you have a sense of what size college/university might suit you best? If so, please indicate below.

6. Do you think you know what you want to study in college? Yes No
If you checked "yes," what is your intended area of study?

7. Are there any other general preferences you have at this point?
Fraternities and sororities? No frats or sororities? Colder climate?
Warmer climate? Other?

College questionnaire for students (page 2)

Questions About You

The following questions can help you focus the college selection and admission process where it belongs — on you! An honest and thoughtful self-evaluation can reveal what you should look for in the colleges. It will also prepare you for statements you will be asked to make about yourself on essays and, perhaps, in interviews when you apply to colleges. Please answer the questions on a separate piece of paper and attach it to the questionnaire. There are, of course, no right or wrong answers.

Your Goals and Values

1. What aspects of your high school years have you enjoyed the most? If you could live them over again, would you do anything differently? If so, what?
2. What values are most important to you? What do you care about most?
3. How do you define success? Are you satisfied with your accomplishments to date? What do you want to accomplish in the years ahead?
4. What kind of person would you like to become? Of your unique gifts and strengths, which would you most like to develop?
5. If you had a year to go anywhere and do whatever you wanted, where would you go and what would you do?

College questionnaire for students (page 3)

6. What events/experiences have shaped your growth and way of thinking?

Your Education

1. What are your academic interests? Which courses have you enjoyed the most and which have been the most difficult for you?
2. What do you choose to learn when you can learn on your own? Consider interests pursued beyond class assignments: topics chosen for research papers, independent projects, reading on your own, job or volunteer work, etc.
3. How do you learn best? What methods and styles of teaching engage your interest and effort the most?
4. How would you describe your high school? Has the environment encouraged you to develop your interests, talents and abilities? What would you preserve and/or change about the school if you had the authority and money to do so?
5. What has been your most stimulating intellectual experience in recent years?

Assessing your list of colleges

As you develop a list of colleges that interest you, be sure you can answer these questions about them.

The basics

- Where is the college? Can you locate it on a map? Is it too close to home? Is it too far? Is it too cold or too hot there?
- Have you taken the course work the college requires for admission?
- What size is the college? How many students are undergraduates?
- What is the college's selectivity ratio (what proportion of applicants were admitted last year)?
- Does the college offer majors that interest you?
- Is the college coed or single sex?
- What percentage of students live off campus?
- How many of the students graduate in four years? Five years? Six years?
- How many first-year students return for their sophomore year?
- How much does the program cost? What is the total per-year expense?
- What type of financial aid is available?

Where would you fit in?

- What are the admission test scores at the colleges that interest you? Where does that place you?
- What were the high school GPAs of most of the freshmen last year?
- Are freshmen guaranteed on-campus housing? If not, where do they live?
- Are there extracurricular activities that interest you?

Visit the colleges' websites, read the guidebooks and look at their literature

- What are their strong academic programs? (Ask a college representative, students, graduates and teachers.)
- What courses are required for graduation?
- Are the courses you need/want available each semester? At convenient times?
- Are there special programs that interest you (study abroad, internships, etc.)?
- What is the social life like? What percentage of students join fraternities or sororities?
- Do the pictures and the language the college uses to describe itself attract you?
- What is your general impression of the college?

Assessing your list of colleges (page 2)

- Is the school accredited?
- If professional certification is required for employment in the field that interests you, how many students enrolled in the school's program pass the certification exam?

Admission process

- When are applications due?
- Does the college accept the Common Application? If so, does it require supplemental forms?
- What does the application contain? Are essays required?
- Is an interview suggested or required? Is an interview available from staff or alumni?
- When may you visit the college? What is its policy regarding campus visits?
- What are the financial aid deadlines? What financial aid forms are required?

Now answer these questions

- Am I a strong candidate for admission to this college?
- If I am not a strong candidate, what are my chances?
- Do I want to visit this college?
- What additional information do I need?

Source: Susan Stagers, Cary Academy, North Carolina

College questionnaire for parents or guardians

Name of Student: _____

1. Do you have a preference for how far from home your child's college is located?
2. Do you have a preference for an urban, suburban or small-town campus?
3. Indicate any preferences you have for the location of your child's college:
 - Southeast Midwest
 - Southwest Northeast
 - West Coast No preference
 - Northwest
4. Do you have a specific preference for:
 - a public college/university?
 - a private college/university?
 - a college with a religious affiliation?
 - no preference
5. Please list specific colleges/universities you would like your child to learn about.

6. What particular area of study interests your child?

College questionnaire for parents or guardians (page 2)

7. How do you view your child's actual academic progress so far?

8. What do you believe are your child's strengths in applying for college?
 - a. Academic strengths:

 - b. Other strengths:

9. You are invited to write a letter to the college counselor describing your child, specifically narrating events or anecdotes that characterize or illustrate your child's personality. What would you like us to know about your son or daughter? What experiences have shaped his or her personality? What makes your child special? Are there special circumstances you would like the college adviser to know about that would help with the college search? What do you hope your child will gain from the college experience?

Parent/Guardian Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Source: *Susan Staggers, Cary Academy, North Carolina*

Tips for parents on finding a college match

How can your child find colleges that match specific needs? First, identify priorities. Next, carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools. Finally, match the two. Here are some college characteristics to consider.

Size of student body

Size will affect many of your child's opportunities and experiences:

- range of academic majors offered
- extracurricular possibilities
- amount of personal attention your child will receive
- number of academic resources (e.g., books in the library)

In considering size, your child should look beyond the raw number of students attending. For example, perhaps your child's considering a small department within a large school. Your child should investigate not just the number of faculty members, but also their accessibility to students.

Location

Does your child want to visit home frequently, or is this a time to experience a new part of the country? Perhaps an urban environment is preferred, with access to museums, ethnic food or major league ball games. Or maybe it's easy access to the outdoors or the serenity of a small town.

Academic programs

If your child has decided on a field of study, your child can research the reputations of academic departments by talking to people in the field of interest. If your child is undecided, as many students are, your child may want to choose an academically balanced institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Students normally don't pick a major until their sophomore year, and those students who know their major before they go to college are very likely to change their minds. Most colleges offer counseling to help students find a focus.

In considering academic programs, your child should look for special opportunities and pick a school that offers a number of possibilities.

Tips for parents on finding a college match (page 2)

Campus life

Before choosing a college, your child should learn the answers to these questions:

- What extracurricular activities, athletics, clubs and organizations are available?
- Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students?
- How do fraternities and sororities influence campus life?
- Is housing guaranteed?
- How are dorms assigned?

Cost

In considering cost, look beyond the price tag. Because of financial aid, most students pay less than the "sticker price," so don't rule out a college that would be a good fit for your child before you find out how much financial aid it will offer. Most colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend.

Diversity

Your child should explore what can be gained from a diverse student body. The geographic, ethnic, racial and religious diversity of the students can help students learn more about the world. Investigate which student organizations or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations are active and visible on campus.

Retention and graduation rates

One of the best ways to measure a school's quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percentage of students who return after the first year and the percentage of entering students who go on to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates indicate that responsible academic, social and financial support systems exist for most students.

Source: www.collegeboard.org