

Be prepared.

Before the big day, visit www.annarborcollegefair.weebly.com and scan through the list of colleges and universities that will be represented. Make a note of the schools that interest you the most, and plan to visit their booths at the fair.

Are you looking for colleges that are close to home, or those that are far away? Are you interested in small, private schools, or large, public universities? Which of the institutions in attendance offer your projected major?

“Planning ahead can help you stay focused,” said Cynthia Kaan, a Ferris State University (MI) admission officer. “If you have certain schools you know you are interested in, don’t limit yourself, but make learning about those schools your priority.”

Make your questions count.

Like so many other things in life, a successful visit to a College Fair is marked by quality, not quantity.

In other words: Rather than focusing on collecting a brochure from every college booth, make it your goal to have in-depth conversations with a few of the college reps on hand.

“I encourage students to not just stop by the table and pick up a brochure, but rather engage the representative with a few questions,” said Valencia Hamman, co-director of college counseling at La Jolla Country Day School (CA). “That means you want to come into the fair with a list of questions so you’re ready for that opportunity.”

Don’t waste time on softball queries, such as “Is your nursing program good?”

“That’s not a good question because it gets you nowhere ... no one is going to tell you that their program is terrible, or that it is struggling,” Kaan said. “If you’re interested in a specific program, like nursing, ask

college reps what sets their program apart from other colleges, or ask them to compare their nursing program with one at another college that you're considering."

Keep an open mind.

Take time to do a little exploring.

Yes, it's important to plan ahead and select a few colleges you know you want to visit.

But The Ann Arbor College Fair draws representatives from over 100 campuses. The schools are located throughout the US, and from around the globe.

You owe it to yourself to follow-up with colleges that catch your eye. "Do your research, but also have an open mind," Hamman said. "Sometimes students take time to talk with a representative from a school that they really hadn't considered before and it becomes a part of their list."

Chatting with representatives from a variety of colleges can also help you cement your own preferences, Kaan noted.

"It's just as important to figure out what you don't want as it is to figure out what is really attractive to you," she said.

Follow up.

Ask college reps for their contact information and be sure to follow up.

"Not always, but often, the representative that is attending the college fair is the representative that will end up reading your application," Hamman said. "Keep in touch with them; reach out with thoughtful, intelligent questions. That demonstrates interest."

For the colleges you want to know more about, schedule campus visits.

Remember: Your trip to a college fair is the beginning—not the end—of your college search.

“Visiting a campus is by far the most important aspect of looking for a college,” Kaan said. “There’s no other experience like it. It’s the best way to find your perfect fit.”