



March

College Fairs

When choosing a college, you need all the information you can get. But visiting each campus can be expensive. And who has time to research hundreds of websites or call each school individually?

That's where college fairs come in. College fairs are a 'one-stop shopping' kind of experience - a mini-convention for students and college representatives, designed to give students a chance to explore all their options quickly and efficiently.

Where do you find out about college fairs?

The National College Fairs Program (a division of NACAC) sponsors about 35 college fairs at convention centers around the country every year. One is held right in **Grand Rapids at the DeVos Place on Tuesday, March 28 from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 6 to 8 p.m.** Over 100 colleges are generally represented, and this is a great opportunity for students and parents to gain information about prospective colleges. Additionally, there are informational sessions concerning a variety of college topics, such as financial aid and the college admission process that families can take advantage of. Admission is FREE! To learn more about the *Western Michigan National College Fair*, visit

<https://www.nacacfairs.org/attend/national-college-fairs/western-michigan-college-fair/>. Students are encouraged to register online to avoid having to complete paperwork at the fair, although online registration is not required in order to attend.

What should you expect to learn?

Students get a better perspective on where they want to further their education and the resources they need to achieve their goals. Although college alumni sometimes speak at college fairs about their alma maters, the primary college representatives are paid admissions professionals that have a factual knowledge about life on campus.

What kinds of materials will college reps give you?

You'll be able to collect brochures, viewbooks and applications for admissions and financial aid for most visiting colleges. What you won't get are college sweatshirts, posters, pennants or bumper stickers. Selling or giving away promotional items like these is generally a no-no at college fairs, because parents and high school counselors don't want your opinion swayed by which college gave away the best goodies.

How should you prepare?

You should have some idea of what **type** of college you want to attend. Consider whether you'd prefer a small or large college, what types of studies you might pursue, whether you want to stay close to home or go somewhere far away, what kinds of sports you'd like to see at a college and whether you want an urban or rural environment. Once you've narrowed down your preferences, then you should do some preliminary research on a few schools that interest you.

What do you need to bring?

Bring a notebook and pen to take notes. Don't rely on your memory—once you've left the fair, you're bound to forget which college representative told you what. Keep all your notes, brochures, etc. in one place at home, so you'll find it easily when it's time to apply and when you're ready to choose a school.

*Some information taken from <http://www.universityinfoonline.com>.

College Fair Checklist

Before the fair...

- Review the list of college fair participants.
- Locate the schools you want to interview.
- Check out the schedule of information sessions.

Check off questions you would like to ask school representatives.

Admissions

- What are the admission requirements?
- What qualities should prospective students have?
- Which standardized test scores do you require?
- What majors are offered? What's the most popular?
- What are the application deadlines for admission?
- Are interviews required? Are there group or individual interviews?
- How can I arrange a campus visit?
- How long should I expect to wait for an answer once I submit my application?

Financial aid

- How much will it cost?
- What financial aid options are offered?
- When is your financial aid deadline?
- Estimate the percentage of work study, loans, grants, and scholarships awarded in your financial aid packages.

Classroom

- What is the average class size?
- How accessible are professors outside of class?
- Will professors or graduate students teach my courses?
- When must I choose a major?
- Do I need a computer?
- What student services are offered (tutoring, career counseling, study workshops)?
- How are the libraries, computer labs?

Housing

- What type of housing is available?
- Is student housing guaranteed for four years?
- Would I have a roommate or live alone?
- How are roommates selected?

Student life

- What special interest groups, activities, fraternities/sororities are available?
- What's it like on campus on the weekends?
- Are any programs offered to help students adjust to the college life?
- Are intramural, club, and varsity sports offered?
- How are the sports facilities?
- What types of meal plans are available?

Just the facts

- What is the school known for?
- What are recent graduates doing now?
- How many freshman return for their sophomore year?
- How safe is the campus and its surrounding neighborhoods?

Factors to Consider: Find the Right Fit

Things to think about as you look for schools:

Cost. What will your total annual costs be, including tuition and fees, room and board, books, travel and other expenses? Out of state tuition is typically more expensive than in state.

Location. This is a biggie. Do you move away or not? If you decide you might go to a school away from home, factor in the cost of traveling to and from school for holiday and semester breaks.

On campus or off. If you go to a school nearby, do you want to live at home, in an on-campus dorm/residence hall or in private, off-campus housing? If you attend a school away from home, do you want to live in an on-campus dorm or in private housing? These decisions may require you to balance cost versus other factors, such as your independence and lifestyle.

Size. Do you want a small, intimate setting? A school that's big enough to be a city by itself? Or something in between?

Majors and concentrations offered. If you have an idea of what you want to study, does the school offer that major? Does their program have a good reputation? If you aren't sure what you want to study, does the school give you plenty of options?

Flexibility. If you need to work full-time while you go, does the school have night courses or other options to accommodate you? Will they let you go part-time? Do they offer summer courses?

Admission requirements. What academic standards (grade point average, required courses, etc.) do you have to meet in high school to get in? Which tests will you have to take?

Accreditation. Is the school accredited? An accredited school meets certain standards set by an independent agency. Accreditation helps ensure the training and education you receive will meet the standards of employers in a specific field.

Campus life. Does the school offer activities and social opportunities you like?

Religious affiliation. Do you want to attend a school associated with a particular religion?

Career services. Does the school have programs with a good track record for helping graduates find good jobs?

**Information taken from <http://www.descofcu.org>.*

Listed below are a few web sites that you can use to explore colleges:

<http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>

<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

<http://www.careercruising.com> (username: zeelandeast or zeelandwest; password: chix or dux)