

5 Fabulous Questions

Ask these at your next college fair!

The Fabulous 5 will help you determine if you should spend time learning more about a college. As you continue your college search, you'll develop questions that reflect your specific interests and values.

1. How would you describe the student body personality?

Each college campus has a personality, revealed through its student body. Of course, not everyone on campus has exactly the same personality, but a student body tends to value certain qualities. For example, some campuses are politically liberal; some are conservative. A student body might especially value the arts, or athletics or community service. This question helps you determine if you might fit in well among your potential classmates.

2. How is this school distinctive?

Each school has a unique story. Maybe you'll learn about a newly developed internship program; maybe you'll hear about an unusual curriculum or a special program for freshman. Because college administrators can't include every extraordinary opportunity in publications or on websites, this question is one of the best ways to learn about them. (If an admissions counselor mentions a program that interests you, make a note to follow up with an e-mail or phone call to get more information. It's a sure way to earn some brownie points when applying!)

3. How many students transfer to another school during or after their freshman year?

This question offers a glimpse of how satisfied current students are. You obviously want to attend a school where your peers are generally happy. Sometimes a high transfer rate indicates that students aren't finding what they thought they'd find at school; sometimes a high transfer rate is related to a change in curriculum or financial aid. If the transfer rate is high, ask why and listen carefully to the response.

4. How would you describe students' relationships with professors?

Chances are, admissions counselors will answer this question by first telling you who teaches undergraduate courses- professors or graduate assistants. The counselor might also tell you about opportunities for students to collaborate with professors on research. Or maybe she'll mention that professors give out their home phone numbers so students can reach them outside the class and office hours. You'll have a general idea about how accessible the professors are- an important part of your college experience.

5. How do you award scholarships and financial aid?

Colleges and universities have widely different policies about scholarships. Some schools require separate applications for scholarships; some simply award scholarships based on information in the student's application. A university might offer scholarships for specific academic programs or for artistic or athletic talent. You need to know not only how to apply for these awards, but also which qualities the scholarship committees weigh most heavily. You also need to know how a college awards financial aid, which is based on your family's need. Often, colleges and universities require you to complete the FAFSA; but a college might have an institutional form you must complete as well.

