

The College Fair Playbook

35 Essential Questions Every Student Should Ask Admissions Officers

How to Use This Guide

You don't need to ask all 35 — pick 3 to 5 questions per booth based on what you actually want to know. The best conversations happen when you follow up on the answer instead of reading straight down a list. A few habits that make a real difference at a college fair:

- Write down answers on the spot. You may not remember which officer said what by the fifth booth.
- Save your most specific question for last, once you've built a bit of rapport with the officer.
- If an answer surprises you, ask a follow-up question.

Understanding the University

At the Pioneer Summit College Fair, admissions officers will have the opportunity to briefly share general information about their university. Make sure to also research the university's website before meeting with an admissions officer to see which questions can be answered online and which need further clarification.

- 01 How do you support students who want to double major or study across departments?
- 02 What traits best embody the most active contributors to your campus community?
- 03 Which majors or departments are your students/your institution most excited about?
- 04 What is freshman orientation like? Is it mostly on-campus, or are there other off-campus/virtual components?
- 05 Are there required freshmen-specific courses?
- 06 What has been your institution's response to AI in the classroom and in admissions?

Admissions: What Really Matters?

- 07 Beyond GPA and test scores, what are the strongest things an applicant can show you?
- 08 How do you evaluate co-curricular activities?
- 09 What are some common mistakes students make when writing about their activities or research in an essay?
- 10 How does your office verify or contextualize a rigorous program that isn't run by the high school itself?
- 11 Does arriving with college credit already earned change how you evaluate an applicant?
- 12 What separates a 'good' applicant from one who is accepted into your most selective programs?
- 13 What culture does admissions look to cultivate when it constructs its class?

Research & Academic Opportunities

- 14 Do underclassmen have access to research opportunities, or are they mostly reserved for upperclassmen?
- 15 What rough percentage of undergraduates work directly with faculty on research?
- 16 How do you evaluate applicants who have completed independent or mentored research?

- 17 How important is demonstrated intellectual curiosity compared to grades alone?
- 18 Do you offer structured undergraduate summer research programs? What is campus like over the summer?
- 19 How does your institution support students looking for on-campus employment (either through Federal Work Study or just as a part-time position)?

Academic Coursework and Co-Curricular Programs

- 20 What credit do you accept for accredited college-level coursework completed in high school?
- 21 How many transfer or advanced-standing credits do incoming students typically bring with them?
- 22 With so many 'pay-to-play' programs out there, what qualities tend to separate genuine academic experiences from more superficial, "resume-building" ones?
- 23 How flexible are individual courses within general graduation requirements? Would you categorize your requirements as a core curriculum, distribution requirements, or an open curriculum?
- 24 What options does your institution have to "create" majors or individual concentrations within majors?
- 25 Do you have unique graduation requirements (e.g., a senior capstone, "January-term" or project-based requirements, physical education courses, etc.)?

Student Life & Long-Term Outcomes

- 26 How do you support first-generation or international students academically?
- 27 What social activities or clubs are available at your campus to support international students?
- 28 What academic or socioemotional supports are you particularly proud to say your university offers?
- 29 What is your favorite building/spot on campus?
- 30 What does a typical week look like for a first-year student balancing classes, activities, and research?
- 31 How connected is your campus to nearby universities, labs, or research institutions?
- 32 What's something students wish they'd known about academic life here before enrolling?
- 33 What do your most successful alumni tend to have in common academically, even before they arrived on campus?
- 34 Do students who arrive with prior research experience get involved in campus research faster?
- 35 How many of your students go on to graduate school or research careers, and what tends to predict that path?

Expert Tips

- Make sure to visit as many booths as possible and download their materials to your digital swag bag!
- You can also check out session recordings from [Past Pioneer Summits](#) for more insights from admission officers and education leaders.

Ready to Learn More About College?

Attend the College Fair at the [Pioneer Co-Curricular Summit](#) to connect with admission officers from elite universities! This September event is free for students and educators, virtual, and open for all to register. Learn more on our [website](#).