



TOP 12 TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OF A VIRTUAL COLLEGE FAIR By Pam McKeta

This column features articles you can share with the students and families you serve. The text may be shared outside this publication as long as NACAC is credited with the copyright. Would you still think about college even when everyone is staying at home?

Yes! Don't let the pandemic dampen your college dreams. Find a college and apply. A good way to get started is by attending a virtual college fair. Hundreds of college representatives are online at the same time on each virtual fair date. They're there to meet with high school juniors and seniors just like you.

The biggest college fairs in real life—and online—are offered by NACAC, the worldwide association for counselors and admission professionals. This fall, NACAC is offering four free, one-day, virtual college fairs on Sept. 13, Oct. 12, Oct. 18, and Nov. 8. More than 600 colleges will be at each fair.

Colleges that attend virtual college fairs are looking for students who will thrive on their campus. You are looking for a place that helps you get where you want to be. A virtual college fair brings everyone together to explore their options and find the best fit.

Here are 12 tips on how to make the most of attending a virtual college fair.

1. **PUT A PIN IN IT** There are many virtual college fairs. Find one by searching on Google or, even better, take the advice of your high school counselors who'll let you know which college fairs they recommend. Add the dates to your calendar.
2. **REGISTER FOR REAL** Use your real name and address when you register. This information gets sent to the colleges for their records. You'll want to make sure your digital footprint is professional.
3. **CHECK OUT THE COLLEGES** See the list of colleges that will be at the virtual fair. Click around to find out what they say about themselves and check out their videos. Make a note or "favorite" the ones that sound interesting.
4. **CREATE YOUR ITINERARY** The best part of virtual college fairs are the Zoom sessions. See which colleges are offering interesting sessions and add them to your itinerary, either by clicking on them within the platform or by jotting down the date and time.
5. **INVITE YOUR MOM** Or dad, or grandparent, or friend. Fairs are fun when you can go with someone. Log in separately and text back and forth. Or, attend a college's Zoom presentation or meeting side-by-side.
6. **DO A TECH CHECK** Make sure your tech is ready to go. Charge your phone ahead of time or, if using a computer, download software that's required. Practice using Zoom, plug in your headphones, and use the webcam if available.

7. YOUR ROOM ON ZOOM If you're using a camera, be aware of what others can see. Use a Zoom background if you'd like to keep your surroundings private. Also, a quiet room will be less distracting to you and whoever you're talking with.

8. GO AND LOOK AROUND Show up on the day of the fair. Enter different "rooms" to hear what the college representatives are saying. This is your chance to learn a lot in a short period of time. If others are already in the virtual room when you enter, that's okay—you're welcome to join.

9. SHOW YOUR BEST SELF Make a good impression. Be comfortably dressed, but maybe not in pajamas. Arrive on time for Zoom sessions or meetings. College representatives love meeting students and will ask you questions. Think about how you will introduce yourself and what you want to say, especially about where you're from and what you hope to find in a college. Smile and nod occasionally as you would in real life.

10. ASK QUESTIONS The virtual college fairs are for you! Don't be afraid to ask about test scores, financial aid, sports, student life, diversity, or other topics. Maybe you want to know what the college's coronavirus plans are for next year. Maybe a scholarship would really make a difference in whether you could afford to attend. Ask questions and take notes.

11. STAY HYDRATED Only half kidding. Zoom can be tiring. Have water nearby, sit comfortably, and enjoy the experience.

12. FOLLOW UP Did you meet a college representative who had great things to say? Make a note of their name and contact information and follow up directly if you wish. Virtual fairs that offer one-on-one meeting slots are especially helpful when you have special considerations to talk over with the admission representative.

Most of all, dream. Don't hold back. A virtual college fair will include big colleges and small colleges, those that are nearby and those from across the world. You'll see schools that play bigtime college sports and others you've never heard of where everyone gets to play, learn, and grow.

What would it be like to study at a smaller school or to major in a special program you're interested in? Attend a virtual college fair to explore and discover more about colleges and about yourself.

—Pam McKeta