**Top Five Ways to Impress an Admissions Officer**

By Liluye Jhala

It's September and the start of another busy fall semester. If you are a Junior or a Senior, you probably already know that this is the time of year when college representatives are in your hometown visiting your high school, having evening receptions, and attending local college fairs. These are all excellent ways to get information without having to visit the campus. It is also an opportunity to make a great impression on the admissions officer who may be evaluating your application in a few short months.

As a former admission officer at Brown, I know how eye opening it is to meet students in their schools or hometowns. While the sheer volume of students can be overwhelming, it was always refreshing to meet someone who was enthusiastic, sincere, and knowledgeable about Brown. Even after weeks away from home, I came back to Providence remembering a handful of students who made a positive impression on me. Here are my top five tips for making yourself a memorable candidate to any visiting admissions officer.

**1. Be five minutes early**After you've decided which colleges you'd like to get to know better, plan ahead and try to get there early. If you are there first, you might have the opportunity to spend one-on-one time with the admissions officer. If it's a presentation, get a good seat close to the officer and take that time to introduce yourself. If it's a college fair, try to be one of the first individuals to speak with the admissions officer.

**2. Dress (and behave) to impress**At the end of one of my typical presentations to a classroom of 150 students, most dressed very casually, I wandered to the back of the room and wound up chatting with a soft-spoken man in a suit. He followed every word I said and I assumed he was a teacher. At the end of our discussion, though, he thanked me for my talk and asked for my e-mail address. His whole presentation really made him stand out from his classmates. Remember, it's your job to make a positive impression. So, dress well and speak intelligently. You'll not only impress the admissions officer, but your classmates and teachers as well.

**3. Prepare yourself for thoughtful questions**Do your research on each college before they visit. You should be prepared not only to ask the admissions officer a few questions yourself but to be asked some basic questions in return. Rest assured that unless it is a formal interview, the admissions officer is not interviewing you and, consequently, you probably will not be forced to speak on your greatest disappointments or academic hurdles during your very brief time together. However, you might want to have tentative responses to these very common questions:

What first drew you to this school?

Why do you want to attend?

What are your academic interests?

What do you do for fun?

What books do you read for fun?

Remember, be as specific as possible. The first and second question are similar; the difference, however, is that the second question asks you to define what exactly makes a particular school special (i.e. The New Curriculum at Brown). Your response to the first question, however, could be based upon your own personal experience with a school (i.e. "it was so beautiful and I just loved the small community.") Also, be sure to include why a particular feature is appealing to you. The admissions officer is, after all, trying to get to know you as a person. Be honest.

For your part, ask the admissions officer a few qualitative, NOT quantitative, questions. A quantitative question might be about Brown¹s average SAT score, an answer to which you could easily find on Brown's website or in any college guidebook. As a matter of fact, before you attend any kind of university function for prospective students, you should already know the following about the school:

* Required tests and courses. Do you have to take SAT Subject Tests or four years of a foreign language?
* The school's general curriculum and grading basics. A university may offer a range from a core curriculum to an open curriculum to a great-books program. Also familiarize yourself with the university's grading system.
* Their current admission stats: the academic and standardized test averages of admitted students (i.e. the mean class rank, GPA, SAT etc.).
* The majors, minors, or concentrations offered. After all, you cannot study Egyptology everywhere.
* Their financial aid and/or work-study programs.

If you have a firm grasp on all of the above, you won't be tempted to ask questions you should already know the answer to. Here's an example of a qualitative question that impressed me: "How has President Simmons' push for globalization influenced the research areas in the international relations department or expanded study abroad options?" Try to ask a question that digs deeper into the academic and social experience of being a student at that specific school.

**4. End the conversation on a good note**  
Harassing the admissions officer by dominating the conversation or monopolizing his or her time will leave a bad impression. Instead, after asking your three thoughtful, qualitative questions, end the conversation by saying, "I do have more questions, but let me give you time to meet with other students. Can I have your email/business card so I can keep in touch?" Be sure to say thank you and goodbye with a firm handshake.

**5. Follow up within 48 hours**  
When you get home, review your notes from the day. Then, write the admissions officer a short thank you e-mail, mentioning a few details from your prior conversation. Make sure you include your first and last name, high school, and the date of your conversation. This will help your admissions officer remember your face out of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of students from his or her fall recruitment travels. Use this e-mail to ask another follow-up question and make sure you convey how genuinely enthusiastic you are about the possibility of applying to their school. Don't be disappointed if you don't get a response. Remember, you are demonstrating sincere interest and that leaves a lasting impression.

Armed with these tips, you will make a wonderful first and lasting impression on the admissions officers of your top schools. Work hard this semester and remember to have fun while researching schools. Good luck!