

Perspectives

A personal view of the University

Qs & As

Since the mid-1960s, I have been an "alumni rep" for Syracuse University—one of 220 alumni representing SU to high school students and parents in their local areas.

After 20 years of "repping," I think I can say with confidence that no group of people harbors more unusual perceptions of Syracuse University than prospective freshmen and their parents. From the naïve high school senior who thinks that Syracuse is "near Buffalo somewhere" to the informed student who already knows what "HL" stands for, I meet them all.

"Are pillow fights allowed in the dorms?" was the first question one young woman asked me several years ago. She was an only child and had attended just one pajama party in her life, where a pillow fight broke out. She had found this so much fun she assumed that pillow fights were a nightly ritual in college dorms. She could hardly wait! I assured her that pillow fights are allowed if they don't get out of hand.

Reps are asked to represent the University at College Fairs and College Nights. College Fairs are staged by all the high schools in a given area; the fairs are large and noisy, with hundreds of colleges represented. Each rep is besieged by a dozen—or more—students at a time, each with a different question. The answers must be quick: "Yes, we do have a pre-med program. No, we don't have a major in astronomy. No, freshmen may not have cars on campus. Indoor tennis courts? I don't know."

College Nights are a bit easier. They are held by one high school (or, at most, two or three). Each college is assigned a table in the school's gym or cafeteria; assignments are usually alphabetical, so

many of us have gotten to know the people from Susquehanna and Swarthmore.

Students come by the Syracuse table in twos and threes and the most often asked question is, "What SAT score do I need to get into Syracuse?" We know the answer by heart: "That depends on the college to which you apply." Usually, then, we can provide an approximate SAT standard for the particular college, although we also point out that the University uses far more than just SATs to choose its students.

The second most frequent question is usually posed by the parents: "How much does it cost to go to Syracuse?" The admissions office keeps reps informed of the current tuition and room-and-board costs, so we're prepared to answer this question, but we're not always prepared for the reaction. "Is that with or without maid service?" was one father's response last fall. No parent has yet fainted, but gasping, groaning, and eyes rolling heavenward are common.

If the students and parents are still there after hearing about SAT scores and costs, the next question is usually about academic programs. For the past five years, most of the questions have been about majors that would lead to high starting salaries: business, engineering, computer science. Before that, it seemed as though more than half the students wanted premed. This year, to my delight, there have been more questions about the humanities.

Students are becoming increasingly aware of the dual enrollment programs at Syracuse, such as management/communications or arts and sciences/engineering. Sometimes, though, a student is intent on a combination that doesn't exist, at least not at Syracuse.



Grace Frary, an editor with Music Trades Corp. in Englewood, N.J., is also an alumna who helps SU communicate with prospective students.

"I know all about your communications school," one young woman said at a College Night last year, "but how about your horticulture program?" I told her we don't offer a horticulture major, and she sighed. "I'm almost at the end of the alphabet and I haven't found one college with good programs in both communications and horticulture." She strode off toward the T-Z end of the cafeteria, and I still wonder if she found what she wanted.

"Syracuse is just a football and basketball school, right?" Fortunately, this accusation comes up infrequently and we are well-prepared to counter it with facts about the academic prestige of the University. Still, it isn't always easy to steer a football-crazy father away from a discussion of alumnus Joe Morris, star running back for the Giants. (In my territory, there are a lot of Giants fans.)

Occasionally, the role of the rep is misunderstood by students and parents, particularly if their first contact with us is a phone call. Some think we're Syracuse "recruiters," out to

twist their arms until they wouldn't dream of going elsewhere. Others think we're directly involved with the admissions decision, and students who make a good impression on us are "in."

We're neither recruiters nor admissions officers; we're more like public-relations agents.

Most of the time, being a rep is eminently satisfying. All of us spent four great years on campus and we take great pride in our alma mater; conveying our enthusiasm to prospective students is easy.

But there are disappointments, especially when a student decides not to attend Syracuse after all. He's shown great interest, he's been admitted and you can picture him walking across campus, crossing Marshall Street, sitting in HL, studying in the library, cheering in the Dome. And then he decides to go to a school in the south "because I can play tennis outdoors every day."

The best times, though, are those when we are a real help to students and their families. Take the case of a young man from northern New Jersey who was admitted, offered a partial scholarship, and planned to attend SU, but his father died suddenly in the spring and Syracuse was now financially impossible. Neither the student nor his mother knew that a decrease in the family's income could affect the amount of his scholarship, and they were about to notify the University that he wouldn't be attending.

A rep heard about the situation and notified the admissions office. His scholarship was changed from partial to full, and he went off to Syracuse in the fall.

At times like that, a rep is awfully glad to have the answers to the questions.

—Grace Frary