— It’s 7:45 on a Sunday morning in March, and Heather Murphy, an admissions counselor for the University at Albany, is at the Amtrak train station in Rensselaer, N.Y., awaiting departure of train No. 252 bound for New York City’s Pennsylvania Station. In her left hand she clutches a large cup of chai latte. Her right hand pulls a wheeled suitcase laden with University admissions publications. She is professional in a pink jacket over a white blouse and black slacks and matching pink purse — a nod to the start of spring on a raw, blustery day. Her shoes are sensible black loafers, flat and soft and well-worn.

“I have some really cute high heels that go with this outfit, but the first thing you learn in admissions is to wear comfortable shoes,” she says. One doesn’t argue after observing Murphy rushing through train stations, riding escalators, hailing cabs, walking along crowded Manhattan sidewalks, standing behind an admissions table all afternoon and returning to Rensselaer that night aboard the No. 265 train — the culmination of a very long day spent mostly on her feet.

This Sunday, Murphy is headed to the 16th annual Chinese-American College Information Program at the Chinese Community Center in Manhattan, in the heart of Chinatown. She is swallowed up in a riot of colors and a cacophony of Chinese dialects on the jam-packed sidewalks during a busy market day. She weaves with agility around street artists, past bright red paper lanterns and food stalls, and beyond clusters of tender green bamboo shoots, baskets of aromatic Chinese herbs and a dozen varieties of mushrooms overflowing onto the sidewalk.

“My recruiting is being driven by the overall goal of increasing the academic quality of our freshman class and bringing in more high-achieving students,” said Andreea, in addition to adopting more stringent admissions criteria, his energetic team also has set itself the task of increasing out-of-state and international applications. In the past few years, he has sent his staff of 13 full-time counselors and four regional representatives farther afield on recruiting trips across the nation and even an international swing through several Asian countries.

Meanwhile, at the Chinese Community Center, Murphy is one of the first to arrive, one hour before the event begins. Murphy finds her assigned table (across from Wesleyan University and in front of St. John’s University) and sets to work draping and smoothing the purple-and-gold University banner over the front edge. She sets up tripods to hold informational placards and with practiced precision lays out stacks of brochures on various majors.

Murphy brings much more to the job than a well-rehearsed pitch. She has developed the range of skills required of an admissions counselor: part salesperson, part marketer, part hand-holder for anxious high school students, part sounding board for parents, part higher education consultant and all-around ambassador for the University. And she is a University alumna herself. “I’ve always held the philosophy of hiring your own graduates whenever possible,” says Andreea, 44, who came to the University five years ago after 18 years in admissions at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, N.H., his alma mater. “A UA alum like Heather has a lot of
genuine enthusiasm for a place where she enjoyed a great educational experience.”

Andrea should know. He hired Murphy during her freshman year as a tour guide and telecounselor to help recruit talented students to the University. After...
playing baseball and possibly football in college, and Sanchez fills him in about the University’s Division I athletic programs.

Sanchez, 29, who’s worked for five years in University admissions, is a warm and friendly presence with families. He relates especially well to students from Manhattan, since he grew up on the city’s Lower East Side after his family emigrated from Mexico when he was 12.

After more than four hours on his feet, his sandwich still uneaten, Sanchez is hungry and his feet are beginning to ache. He shifts back and forth in his black loafers. “I can tell we’re getting close to the end of the fair because my feet are starting to hurt,” he says. But admissions is the city that never sleeps. Aching feet aside, Andrea is preparing to send out a search piece to 85,000 high school students who meet the University’s admissions criteria from across New York State and throughout the mid-Atlantic region. With that broad net cast, it will be up to the skill of admissions counselors like Murphy, Sanchez and Madanick to haul in the next talented freshman class at UAlbany.

Paul Grondahl, M.A. ’84, is an award-winning staff writer at the Albany Times-Union. His third book, I Rose like a Rocket: The Political Education of Theodore Roosevelt, was published by Free Press in June.

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Top 4 Reasons to Attend UAlbany

1. The quality, breadth and depth of the University’s 54 academic majors, several of which are nationally ranked
2. Outstanding faculty
3. The comfortable and safe location of the University in New York’s capital city
4. Tremendous opportunities for University students in internships throughout state government and other fields

“Our recruiting messages consistently point out the academic rigor of the University and the intellectual challenges students can find here. Those messages are really resonating now.”

Admissions Director
Bob Andrea

The Admissions Team
In addition to Heather Murphy and Cesar Sanchez, UAlbany’s admissions counselors include, from left, back row, J.R. Gaige, Meryl Wiener, Renee Marshall, Jane McDonough, and Hank Shuford. In the front row, from left, are Beth Novak and Marcia Hoyte-King.