

# Searching Far and Wide

Ignoring long days and aching feet, UAlbany's admissions team travels across the state, the nation and even around the world. Their goal: recruiting talented members of the University's next freshman class.

By PAUL GRONDAHL

## NEW YORK

— 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.

Sending admissions counselors to the program in Chinatown — as well as to a much larger event going on simultaneously this Sunday across Manhattan at the Jacob Javits Convention Center — is part of a carefully calibrated recruiting strategy for UAlbany. The New York metro area, Long Island and the lower Hudson Valley are critically important to the

University's recruiting efforts, with those three geographic regions accounting for roughly 60 percent of last year's 2,163 new freshmen, according to Bob Andrea, the University's director of undergraduate admissions. Seventeen percent come from central and western New York, 13 percent from the Capital Region, 8 percent from out of state and 2 percent are international students. The final numbers included freshmen from about 40 states across the U.S. and several foreign countries.

"Our 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 Andrea. In addition to adopting more stringent admissions criteria, his energetic team also has set itself the task of increasing out-of-state and international applicants. 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.

Photos: Michael Paras



**Getting to Know You:** Cesar Sanchez (tan coat, dark hair, right center) is one of 500 college and university representatives at the National College Fair in the Jacob Javits Convention Center in Manhattan.

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 Andrea, 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 UAlbany alum like Heather has a lot of

## JOHN POMEROY: Globe-Trotting Recruiter

By Paul Grondahl

John Pomeroy could be forgiven for imagining himself as a rock star being mobbed by teenagers in a hotel ballroom in Shanghai. "I had so many kids pushing in, crowding from behind and in front of our table, that security had to put barriers around me. It was an amazing experience," the assistant director of admissions recalled of a 10-day recruiting tour through Asia last March that was a smashing success.

Pomeroy said the University's location in New York, along with helpful groundwork laid by Asian alumni and parents of current international students, proved a powerful magnet as he visited with thousands of prospective students in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Bangkok and Seoul. It was the fourth year for the Asia trip, a region that provided the majority of 48 international students in last year's freshman class — more than double the 2001 number. In all, there are currently 300 international undergraduate students representing 48 countries and a total of 1,200 from 80 countries, including those in graduate programs.

"We've been building this network for a few years now, and alumni and parents in each city have been enthusiastic supporters," Pomeroy said. He was joined in Seoul and Hong Kong by Sue Faerman, UAlbany's dean of undergraduate studies, who signed an agreement with Seoul National University Institute of Technology. Under the joint program, a Korean student would attend the first two years in Korea and the final two years at the University for a bachelor's degree in public administration. The first students in the joint venture could arrive in Albany starting in 2006 and might eventually number 10 or so.

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 graduating, Murphy, now 22, has worked full-time in admissions for the past two years. Her recruiting territory is primarily Massachusetts and New Hampshire, with occasional events in New York City and the Capital Region.

As an undergraduate, Murphy was a Presidential Scholar and an honors student who majored in history. Born in Korea, Murphy was adopted at seven months and raised in Colonie, a suburb of Albany. She was active with interna-

tional students at the University and was president of the Korean Student Association, and she brings that rich range of experiences to bear as an admissions counselor.

"It's very helpful when I can speak from firsthand experience about being an honors student at the University and about the cultural diversity on campus," she says.

At the Chinese Community Center, where Murphy is one of only a few Asian faces among representatives of 45 colleges and universities, Henry Gu, a sophomore at Baruch High School in Brooklyn, asks: "Where's Albany?" Murphy describes its location and asks Gu about his grades (89 average) and his career plans. "I want to do something that makes a difference in people's lives,"

Gu says. "And something that makes a lot of cash." He smiles and shrugs in the direction of his mom, Xue Xian Liu, a single parent who said financial aid is a major consideration. Murphy hands Gu and his mom some literature and has him fill out a card so that he can receive additional information by mail.

A scene similar to this brief encounter is repeated over and over. Tentative teenagers sidle up to her table, while parents hover a few feet away and peruse admissions literature. Murphy fields continuous questions about admissions requirements (86 percent average, 1100 SAT and in the top half of your class is competitive, but not a guarantee). Lawrence Chuah, a sophomore at James Madison High School in Brooklyn, has a 91 average and is interested in science and math. He'll be the first member of his family to attend college. "I heard about the University at Albany from some kids at my school," he says. "They said it's a good school." His dad, Ricky Chuah, is a produce distributor and worries about the distance and the cost. "I want him to go where he wants, but it has to be affordable," his dad says.

Twin brothers Ken and Ted Lee, both juniors at Brooklyn Technical High School, have heard about the University from their guidance counselors. "Our parents would like us to stay in New York City, but if the school has what we're looking for, we'll go away to college," Ted Lee says.

Anthony Camacho, an admissions advisor based in Manhattan for the State University of New York's 64 campuses, watches Murphy in action and likes the way she connects with students and parents alike. "Albany does extremely well at an event like this because they're becoming well-known in the New York City area," he says.

Meanwhile, at the National College Fair in the cavernous Javits Center — which draws 10,000 visitors and representatives from 500 colleges and universities — the scene is an amped-up version of the Chinatown event. Hundreds of people flow down an

escalator and are disgorged into the convention space every few minutes, clogging the acres of admissions tables. Cesar Sanchez, an assistant director of admissions at the University, and Long Island regional representative Sy Madanick double-team the rushing stream of people. The University's table is between the University of Miami and Long Island University. Sanchez and Madanick — who are too busy to eat their lunch, which sits on the floor behind their table — attract a volume far higher than any other school in their vicinity.

Randi Sherman, a junior at Tottenville High School on Staten Island, stops by

with her parents, Lori and Rich Sherman. She's an honors student, and Sanchez knows her guidance counselor, which provides common ground for a friendly discussion. "I've had a niece and nephew go to the University at Albany and they liked it," her mom says. Sanchez answers her daughter's questions about admissions requirements and the programs in business, which are her interest. She leaves with the promise of making a campus visit.

"This whole thing is a big adventure and it's a little nerve-wracking," says William Lembo, a junior at Xavier High School in Manhattan. He's interested in



Photo: Michael Paras

Last year's freshman class at UAlbany was one of the most talented in recent years, drawn from 17,328 applicants. Their average high school GPA was 90 and mean SAT score was 1168, an increase of 15 points from the year before. Another upward trend: the percentage of freshmen who were ranked in the top 10 percent of their high school senior class. It rose from 16 percent in 2001 to 22 percent last year. The class included 211 Presidential Scholars (up from 173 the year before) and more than 115 College Scholars (up from 87). Preliminary figures for this fall's freshman class compare closely, with average SATs at 1191 and average GPAs at 91.2.

**Admissions counselor** Heather Murphy (pink suit) greets prospective students and parents at a college fair in the heart of Chinatown in New York City.

## 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**



Photo: Mark Schmidt

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.*



### 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.

Photo: Michael Paras