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# Other Factors in Admissions: Beyond the Transcript

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# What We'll Discuss Tonight

- ★ What factors are considered in admission and how important they are
- ★ Different types of colleges and why that matters for admission
- ★ What steps your child can take to maximize his/her chances for admission
  - Factors within our control
  - Factors beyond our control
- ★ Why it's so critical to think long and hard about which colleges to apply to
- ★ How to take the GAME out of the process

# Realities...

- ★ There is no “magic formula” for admission.
- ★ College admission is a conversation - you select, then they select. (You have more power than you think!)
- ★ The process is ultimately “unfair” - they get the final say, but we don’t always know what they’re looking for. (Psst... follow the money!)
- ★ Nobody knows EVERYTHING there is to know about this process.
  - 3,000+ four-year colleges in the US

# The MOST important question in this process....

## ★ WHO IS MY CHILD?

- What is my child passionate about?
- What drives my child?
- These questions should drive the process.

# 73%

Percentage of colleges identifying “Grades in college prep courses” to be of  
CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE in the admission decision

Source: National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), 2019

# 62.1%

Percentage of colleges identifying “Strength of curriculum” to be of  
CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE in the admission decision

Source: National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), 2019

# 45.7%

Percentage of colleges identifying “Admission test scores (SAT, ACT)” to be of  
CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE in the admission decision

Source: National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), 2019

TABLE 7. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2017

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Grades in All Courses	220	74.5	15.0	5.5	5.0
Grades in College Prep Courses	220	73.2	16.8	5.9	4.1
Strength of Curriculum	219	62.1	21.9	8.7	7.3
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	221	45.7	37.1	12.2	5.0
Essay or Writing Sample	220	23.2	33.2	24.1	19.5
Student's Demonstrated Interest	218	16.1	23.9	28.0	32.1
Counselor Recommendation	218	15.1	40.4	26.6	17.9
Teacher Recommendation	219	14.2	40.2	26.5	19.2
Class Rank	220	9.1	29.1	34.1	27.7
Extracurricular Activities	219	6.4	42.9	32.0	18.7
Portfolio	219	6.4	11.9	26.9	54.8
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	219	5.5	18.3	35.2	41.1
Interview	219	5.5	16.4	28.3	49.8
Work	217	4.1	28.6	36.9	30.4
State Graduation Exam Scores	218	2.3	8.7	18.8	70.2
SAT II Scores	216	1.9	5.6	14.8	77.8

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2018–19.



# Some colleges pay more attention to some factors than others...

## ★ Small Colleges

- Holistic approach

## ★ Large colleges

- More “mechanical” review process
  - Less selective colleges may just consider “numbers”
  - More selective colleges may use “numbers” as the initial qualification

## ★ Selective Colleges

- Holistic approach

# Did you know?

The average acceptance rate for all four-year colleges in the U.S. is

**73%.**

Public is 78%  
Private is 70%

(according to a 2019 report from the National Association for College Admissions Counseling)

# Some colleges pay more attention to some factors than others...

## ★ Liberal Arts Colleges vs. Technical Universities

LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES	TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES
<p>Require students to take a wide variety of courses to give them exposure to a variety of liberal arts studies with a broader base of knowledge. In general, they don't focus on career-related classes as heavily as universities do.</p>	<p>Universities focus on each student's major with relatively fewer general core requirements. They offer classes more tailored to each student's specific career needs, especially for those who want to pursue a technical career path.</p>

# Essay or Personal Statement

Statements and essays provide colleges/universities with:

- ★ A measure of writing ability
  - But it's not necessarily about having the best writing skills...
- ★ A measure of fit and interest
  - Have you done your research? Don't just "parrot" back what's on the website!
- ★ A window into each student's background
  - Present an original voice
  - Bring the student to life
  - How does the student think?
  - Think of it as an "on-paper interview"

# Essay or Personal Statement

- ★ Your child doesn't have to have experienced extraordinary things to write an extraordinary essay.
- ★ For inspiration, check out the New York Times top college essays annual feature.
- ★ Show vs. tell: Don't be lazy!
- ★ Authenticity and genuineness

# You're the Admission Counselor!

## Essay #1—Describe a person who has had a significant influence on your life.

The person who has had the biggest influence on my life would be my twirling coach, Nicole. Not only is she a coach, but a friend and a role model.

Although some days at practice can be absolutely dreadful, I know that she only screams and pushes to make us better and I love that about her. Not only is she there for us as a coach, but also as a friend as well. Whenever someone has a rough day, she is the perfect person to talk to. She seems to have the answers to almost everything. She often sits us down as a team and has talks about being the better person in an argument, being a good leader, and most of all, being a good person.

Not a day goes by that I don't think about something that Nicole has taught me. Whether it is getting in a petty fight over nothing or just wanting to be lazy and not pick up by baton for an hour's practice, I often think, Nicole wouldn't be happy with my decision, or Nicole wouldn't do that. She seems to indirectly alter some of the decisions I make, which I believe are standards for a great role model.

If I would have never met my twirling coach, I don't know where I'd be today. So many of my decisions I make are influenced by things she says and her actions. She definitely has had a great amount of influence upon my life as a coach, a friend, and a role model.

# Critique

- ★ Essay lacks depth. The writer just skims the surface and gives the reader vague details about the coach. She doesn't tell HOW her coach influences her life.
- ★ The writing lacks sophistication. The word choice and sentence structure are very simplistic.

## **Essay #4: Describe the environment in which you grew up and how it has shaped your personal goals.**

I grew up in a brick house on Nottingham Drive, a place with old furniture and young faces, with small rooms that never seemed empty. I grew up with my pointy nose buried in books, wearing stretch pants and bows and listening to my father's new songs on the guitar. I sat at a dinner table as girlish voices made fun of that pointy nose along with my big ears, and I finally learned to laugh about them. I grew up with a big-nosed father who always had a joke on his tongue and a mother who always had an answer. I heard that as long as I worked hard enough, I could do anything.

I grew up eating fresh tomatoes from my grandpa's garden and later saw that same garden overrun with weeds. I grew up during summers at the lake, with cousins who couldn't read until fourth grade and could break every object in sight. I watched at a distance as relatives struggled through life, searching for paths to independence. I heard stories from the adults' fold-out table, of women abandoned by the men whom they had depended on. Somewhere amongst those stories, I made up my mind not to make their same mistakes.

I grew up with a determination to make something of myself, to stand apart from the crowd. I listened to seemingly endless stories about the Depression, wars and old friends. I wondered if I would ever get a chance to tell my stories. I wondered what type of stories I would have to tell.

I began to understand that I have a choice. I can choose the stories that I want to tell. I can choose whether or not I repeat others' mistakes. And I can choose what I make of myself. As to how I make these choices, I'm sure that all I have to do is remember the stories from when I grew up.



# Critique

- ★ This essay is an excellent example of how concrete details can create a vivid story.
- ★ The writer's strong observation skills and sensitivity to her family hold the reader's attention.
- ★ Her reflections at the end are well supported by the story.
- ★ The writer uses language well and shows a sense of style.

# Student's Demonstrated Interest

- ★ Showing a college you want them as much as they want you.
- ★ Schools want to enroll students who are eager to attend. Colleges have an easier time predicting their yield if they extend offers of admission to students who have high levels of interest.
- ★ The most elite colleges are almost guaranteed a high yield on their offers of admission, so they don't need to rely on demonstrated interest.  
*Assumption: If you're applying, you're interested.*

# Student's Demonstrated Interest

- ★ There is a fine line between demonstrating interest and harassing the admissions staff!

Ways to Demonstrate Interest	Ways NOT to demonstrate interest
Do the “optional” things, i.e. essays, interviews.	Sending materials a college didn't request.
Visit campus.	Over-communicating with your admission representative (or asking obvious questions).
Make contact with your admission representative.	Having a parent call/email for you.
Apply early if they offer these programs.	Applying Early Decision to a college that is not your first choice.

# Counselor Recommendations

- ★ Provide a global perspective of the student
- ★ Weight placed on recommendation letters will vary based on the size of the school
  - The smaller the caseload, the greater the importance. The larger the caseload, the less the importance.
  - WVHS: Approximately 1:275 ratio of counselor:student (approximately 1:64 counselor:senior students)
- ★ What your child can do:
  - Complete the student profile form and share it with the counselor.
  - Give the counselor a chance to get to know him/her--specific anecdotes are powerful!
  - Give the counselor *at least two weeks* to complete the recommendation.

# Teacher Recommendations

- ★ Provide a specific, local perspective of the student as a learner
- ★ What your child can do:
  - Be strategic in requesting recommenders
    - More recent teachers
    - From subject area(s) that relate to the intended major
  - Complete the student profile form and share it with the teacher.
  - Give the teacher *at least two weeks* to complete the recommendation.

# Interview

- ★ Some schools moving away from interviews due to budgetary restrictions and/or changing times/needs.
- ★ If it's an option, do it!
- ★ What the college is assessing:
  - Are you being you? Or are you being the you you think we want you to be?
    - Not a personality or popularity contest!
- ★ What the student is assessing:
  - Is this college a good match for me?

# Extracurricular Activities

#1 Rule: YOUR CHILD DOESN'T HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING!

- ★ Breadth vs depth of involvement
- ★ How genuine are the interests?
- ★ Factors colleges consider:
  - Does the application look *too* sculpted?
  - Long-term involvement
  - Self-initiated
  - Leadership skills and abilities
  - Activities related to a major or career goal
    - Particularly important when considering direct admission programs, i.e. Engineering, Business, Nursing, etc.

# “Other Factors”

- ★ Geographic location (especially for public universities)
- ★ First generation college student
- ★ Student’s relation to alumni
- ★ Gender



# PASSION

- ★ Needs to apply to the student AND the schools he/she is applying to.
- ★ What schools offer experiences and environments that the student is passionate about?
- ★ Fit should always trump rankings.
- ★ **Admission** does not equal **retention**.

# Developing a “work-out plan”

- ★ What are your child’s goals?
  - Have the conversations and do the work NOW to figure this out.
- ★ What will it take to achieve them?
- ★ Develop a plan that matches what your child is built for!
  - Gymnast vs. long-distance runner vs. wrestler
- ★ Goals should be unique to who your child is and what he/she wants
- ★ Schools that your child applies to should match the goals!

# What if my child is still figuring out his/her passion?

- ★ That's ok!
- ★ Curiosity and introspection are just as valuable
- ★ Is he/she asking the questions to get to that place?
  - Show the process!

**Let's Chat!**

# Resources & Handouts

Admission Decisions: What Counts, College Board.

<https://professionals.collegeboard.org/guidance/applications/decisions>

Factors in the Admission Decision, NACAC.

<https://www.nacacnet.org/factors-in-the-admission-decision/>

Step by Step: College Awareness and Planning for Families, Counselors, and Communities, NACAC.

<https://www.nacacnet.org/step-by-step-college-awareness-and-planning-for-families-counselors-and-communities/>

Admission Review Process & Factors, University of Maryland.

<https://admissions.umd.edu/apply/admission-review-process-factors>

Essays That Worked, Johns Hopkins University.

<https://apply.jhu.edu/college-planning-guide/essays-that-worked/>

# High School & Beyond

Please provide feedback  
on the sessions you  
attended this evening

(can be completed after each session or once  
at the end of the evening)

