

HOW COLLEGES ADMIT STUDENTS (What do they look at?)

Standardized Test Score- ACT, SAT and Related Tests- Despite the fact that some colleges are now positioning themselves as “test optional”, this remains an important factor in most cases. In general however, good test scores cannot save an otherwise weak application. In many cases, weak test scores cannot ruin an otherwise strong application. There are two major exceptions. One is the large university that uses test scores to reduce large numbers of applications to a manageable number that then receive a more thorough review. The other is highly selective colleges who really are looking for the “whole package”- i.e., strength in every area of the application. Some colleges will use standardized test scores for freshman placement. This is particularly true of SAT II scores (Subject Tests) and AP exam scores. Good scores may give you credit hours, exempt you from entry level courses, or satisfy other requirements.

Extracurricular Activities and Work- These experiences show the admissions committee who you are and what you do. Mission trips, jobs, summer courses at a university, or a dramatic areas summer camp tell the committee that you pursue education and experience outside of the “have to” classroom. The list does not have to be a mile long, and you should not list everything you have ever done. They do not want to know that you spent 2 hours your freshman year doing something that you never did again. If any of your activities are related to your career interests, be sure to emphasize those. Demonstrated commitment over time and leadership are recognized as important characteristics.

Teacher and Counselor Recommendations- These first-hand observations give information about a student's personality, motivation for learning, or personal philosophy. Ask someone who knows and likes you. Note: Our small school size helps our teachers write very good recommendations since they really know the students.

Personal Statements, Essays and Writing Samples- This helps the college get an idea of your writing style and how well you express yourself on the page. With the rise of online applications, there is a tendency to submit an essay that has not been fully thought through. Resist the temptation to type it in and hit SEND. Essays submitted online need to go through the same kind of rigor as other essays since they are one and the same thing to the admissions counselor. When you write, get to the point quickly. This is essential given the space limitations you usually have and the time limitations of the admissions counselor reading the essay. The more specific and personal you can be, the better. Avoid lofty language. Find your own voice- not what you think they want.

Interview- Some colleges require a personal interview by either a staff member or an alumnus. This becomes an official part of the admission folder. If an interview is not required but recommended and you really want to attend a certain college, an interview will almost always benefit your application. It allows an admissions counselor to put a face with an application, which is always preferable.

Special Talents/Characteristics- If you have a special talent (musical, artistic, athletic), the college may want you as a member of their student body because of that ability.

Uncommon things sometimes make you particularly appealing to a school. You need to show that talent to professors, coaches and/or admissions officers. Make sure it is on your résumé.

Demonstrated Interest in the College- There is no consistency about how much this enters into an admission office's decision, although there is some evidence that the more selective colleges put more weight on this factor. Early Decision applications clearly show not only demonstrated interest, but absolute commitment. However, ED is only a good option for you if you are completely sure you want to go there. For regular admissions, some schools track everything (phone calls, tours, visits, emails) and use it to judge interest. Others do not. If you are interested in a college it never hurts to let them know that in tangible ways.

Institutional Priorities and Diversity- This is one factor you have no control over. Colleges may allot a certain number of spots to students who move them toward whatever priorities the college has set for itself. This can include things such as ethnic, socioeconomic or geographic diversity, athletics or fine arts.



APPLICATION/ADMISSIONS OPTIONS

Non-Restrictive Application Plans

Students are not restricted from applying to other institutions and have until May 1 to consider their options and confirm enrollment.

Restrictive Application Plans

Students are responsible for determining and following restrictions.

Regular Decision	Rolling Admission	Early Action (EA)	Early Decision (ED)	Restrictive Early Action (REA)
<p>Students submit an application by a specified date and receive a decision within a clearly stated period of time (usually late March or early April). Applications are considered in light of the whole pool of applications.</p>	<p>Institutions review applications as they are submitted and render admission decisions throughout the admission cycle. You may receive a decision within 2-4 weeks after submitting the application. It is in your best interest to apply early since spots could fill up.</p>	<p>Students apply early and receive a decision well in advance of the regular response date. You still have until May 1 to make your decision.</p>	<p>Students make a commitment to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, they definitely will enroll. Therefore, you may not apply ED to more than one school. The application deadline and decision deadline occur early. Deposits are normally due very quickly after acceptance.</p>	<p>Students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision early. You may be restricted from applying ED or EA or REA to other institutions. If offered enrollment, you have until May 1 to confirm.</p>
<p>Commitment: Non-Binding</p>	<p>Commitment: Non-Binding</p>	<p>Commitment: Non-Binding</p>	<p>Commitment: Binding</p>	<p>Commitment: Non-Binding</p>

(Information adapted from NACAC chart on admissions options)

FURTHER NOTES ON EARLY DECISION

- Early Decision can be a good way to let a college know it is your top choice.
- Responses to an Early Decision application can be acceptance, denial or deferral of the application to the Regular Decision application pool.
- Early Decision has been in the news a lot in the last couple of years. There's a wide range of activity surrounding the issue.

Harvard has dropped the Early Decision option, claiming that Early Decision discriminates against lower income applicants. Several other top tier schools followed suit. Others announced their intention to retain their Early Decision option.

One study indicated that applying Early Decision gives you an admissions advantage equivalent to a 100-point higher SAT score.

Many colleges are admitting a larger percentage of their freshman class from the Early Decision pool- a few at 50% or more. As colleges struggle to increase both selectivity and yield, Early Decision is a good way to increase yield.

A drawback of Early Decision is that you are not able to compare financial aid offers before choosing a college.

INTERVIEWS

Very few schools require an interview. Some recommend but do not require one. It is usually to your advantage to do an interview if you can. Anything that helps put a face and a personality with your application is a good thing.

Interview Basics

- Be prompt. If you cannot keep an appointment, call and cancel.
- Dress to impress, nice pants or a skirt. Neatness matters. Don't overdress.
- Be yourself. Feel free to organize your thoughts before you start to respond to a question.
- Ask questions based on what you have read. Be informed about the school so that you can ask intelligent questions, not things already in the college catalog.
- Be prepared to answer questions about your application, discuss your career interest, academic goals and tell why you are interested in that specific college. They will typically be interested in other things as well, such as your leisure-time activities, books you have read recently or interests such as sports or music.
- Be genuine. Do not worry if your mind goes blank or you cannot remember a specific piece of information. You are better off admitting that you don't know than bluffing your way through an answer. Experienced interviewers can spot insincere or "pat" answers.
- Interviews tend to be brief. Leave the direction of the interview in the hands of the admissions officer. They will help make you feel comfortable.
- Ask for their business card when you leave. Having the admission counselor's email address and phone number will be helpful as you think of more questions. Be careful not to bug someone, but contacting a specific person rather than the general admissions office can give you a strong ally within the department- one who knows your demonstrated interest in the school.

Be Ready to Answer

- Tell me something about yourself. What kind of a student are you?
- How do you learn the best?
- How and when did you become interested in this college?
- What things are most important to you in your college search?
- What are your interests? Your strengths? Your weaknesses? What are your goals?
- What interests you about this college?
- What accomplishments are you most proud of? Do you have any questions?

