



December

## **College Admission Criteria**

What do colleges look for in an applicant? When deciding which students to admit to their college, admissions officers look at many different factors. Listed below are the main criteria:

### **Challenging Schedule**

One of the main factors that college admissions officers look for is a rigorous class schedule. Colleges want students who are willing to challenge themselves. For most colleges, this is even better than having the best grades. If an admissions officer is deciding between two applicants, where one student has a 4.0 and takes standard courses and the other applicant has a B average but takes advanced courses, the admissions officer will usually pick the B average student. One important thing to note, however, is not to be overloaded by selecting too many difficult classes. Students should find a balance between challenging themselves but not overwhelming themselves to the point that it backfires and they struggle in all classes. Counselors will meet with students sometime in February or March to help plan their course schedules for the following school year.

### **Grades**

While a challenging schedule may hold a little more precedence, grades are still very important to colleges. Therefore, it is crucial that students keep their grades up throughout their entire high school career. If a student thinks that it's okay to slack off a little bit during the senior year, this student should think again. Colleges require a final transcript (record of academic achievement in high school) be sent upon graduation so they can do a final review of a student's high school progress. Many colleges have been known to revoke their offers of admission to students who suffer from "senioritis" (slacking off in the senior year).

### **Standardized Test Scores (ex. SAT or ACT)**

Colleges do take admissions test scores into consideration. Most colleges require them, although some put less emphasis on the tests. College guidebooks, websites, and admission materials often list the average test scores of students at a college or university. Keep in mind, however, that this is an average, not a minimum. The scores of students admitted to the school are in a range extending below, as well as above, that average. An increasing number of colleges list a range that shows the scores of the middle 50 percent of the students who attend the school.

If a student is aiming for an academic scholarship from a particular college, his/her test scores need to be at or above the high end range for the college in which he/she is applying. If a student's test scores are near the median range, then his/her class schedule and grades may be the main deciding factors for admission. If an applicant's test scores are low, an admissions counselor may go to bat for that student if his/her grades and schedule are outstanding.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

Involvement in extracurricular activities shows admissions officers that a student is well-rounded and has good time management skills. Colleges want students who are going to be involved with activities on their campus. Keep in mind, however, that one should not join a bunch of activities just to fill up his/her high school resume. Admissions officers are looking for quality over quantity. Students should pick a few activities that really interest him/her and become fully involved in them. It looks better on a high school resume when one can say he/she organized a fundraiser for the science club, rather than just being a member of the club.

## Application Essay

The college application essay allows a student to show his/her uniqueness to admissions officers. Counselors look for application essays that are honest and provide supplemental information. Students should not restate the information found on their transcript and application. Instead, students should write about their desires, goals, special events in their life, etc. The essay is an opportunity for a student to personalize the application and express him/herself in a way that he/she cannot in the rest of the application. Admissions officers are not looking for a particular “correct answer” on the essay. They want to find out what students are like as individuals.

The essay is a demonstration of a student’s writing ability, which is a key component of success in college. Students should be sure to use the principles of good writing, such as developing a logical essay structure, checking grammar, and proofreading carefully.

## Letters of Recommendation

Admissions officers rely on letters of recommendation to let them know how others view a student. Students should be sure to pick their recommenders wisely. It is important that these people know the student well enough to provide valuable insight about him/her. They will be asked about a student’s intellectual strengths, personality, and activities outside of school. If a recommender doesn't know a student that well, it will show through his/her letter.

*\*Adapted from ecampustours.com.*

## Factors In The College Admission Decision

Below is a table that provides a complete overview of the relative importance of factors in the admissions decision. Grades in college preparatory courses and strength of curriculum were considered by colleges to be the top factors in the admission decision, followed closely by admission test scores and grades in all courses. Over 81% of all colleges and universities rated grades in college prep courses as “considerably important,” followed by 64 percent for strength of curriculum, 58 percent for admission test scores, and 52 percent for grades in all courses.

### Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to factors in the admission decision: 2013

Factor	Considerable importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No importance
Grades in college prep courses	81.5%	10.4%	7.4%	.7%
Strength of curriculum	63.7	24.8	8.1	3.3
Admission test scores (SAT, ACT).	58.3	29.5	10	2.2
Grades in all courses	51.5	37.4	8.9	2.2
Essay or writing sample	22.2	37.8	22.6	17.4
Student's demonstrated interest	20.1	34.0	23.9	22.0
Counselor recommendation	15.9	43.9	24.7	15.5
Class Rank	15.2	35.3	33.5	16.0
Teacher recommendation	14.1	43.9	28.3	13.8
Extracurricular activities	9.6	40.6	33.9	15.9
Interview	7.8	21.2	27.9	43.1
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	7.5	30.6	32.5	29.5
Portfolio	6.4	9.4	34.3	49.8
SAT II scores	6.0	10.9	23.7	59.4
State graduation exam	3.4	10.1	28.4	58.2
Work	2.6	17.1	51.3	29.0

## **Planning for College**

Listed below are some of the things that parents of college-bound sophomores should talk with their students about.

- Recommend they take the most challenging academic courses *appropriate to their abilities* and the resources of the school and community.
- Encourage involvement in meaningful extracurricular activities and community service. Depth in a few areas is more valuable than a long list of superficial memberships.
- Together, assess and discuss family finances and values that might affect college choice.
- Visit college campuses. These visits may be independently scheduled, or as a part of family vacations and trips.
- Encourage use of the web and college guides to investigate colleges.
- For schools of interest, the student should register as a prospective student through websites and receive further information.
- Emphasize time management, organization skills, and good study habits.

For students who desire to get a jump start on the college research process, here are some helpful websites:

- Career Cruising - <http://www.careercruising.com>  
username: zeelandeast, password: chix
- CollegeBoard – <http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>
- College Navigator - <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>
- My Majors – <http://www.mymajors.com>