

Getting Accepted: What Colleges Look For in Applicants

 inlikeme.com/getting-accepted-what-colleges-look-for-in-applicants/

Admissions officers have varied criteria for evaluating candidates and determining which students to admit. In general, they seek a diverse and balanced body of motivated, involved, and qualified students with genuine interests, impressive achievements, interesting talents & experiences, sound character and real personalities – all with the potential to “fit in” and be an asset to the school. Admissions officers respond positively to their perception of passion, intellectual curiosity, maturity, leadership, commitment and energy.

The admissions committee looks for authentic “surround sound” evidence of these qualities and achievements in the application, essays, interviews, recommendations, and extracurricular activities. These components paint a picture of the candidate that the admissions people use to compare and contrast with other qualified applicants.

The most competitive schools have far more qualified applicants than places in the incoming freshman class. As such, it is a challenge for even the most qualified candidates to stand out. To do so, you need to “wow” the admissions committee with a compelling, cohesive, multi-dimensional self portrait.

1. Curriculum

A rigorous class schedule shows intellectual curiosity, a willingness to challenge yourself and that you are comfortable with hard work. Strong grades in honors and AP courses are typically more impressive than perfect grades in regular classes.

2. Grades and Class Rank

Junior year is most important followed by first semester senior year. Freshman and sophomore grades are typically less significant especially if there is a pattern of improvement. Along with the transcript, high schools provide colleges with a senior class profile. Admissions officers review the profile of your high school to gain perspective of your academic achievements vis-à-vis other applicants from different high schools.

3. Standardized Test Scores

SAT/ACT scores are a major admissions factor at most colleges. Impressive scores will put you in a higher category. Scores provide a standard measure to compare applicants from different schools and backgrounds.

4. Extracurricular Activities, Athletics, Avocations & Summer Experiences

In past years, most successful applicants were well-rounded high-achievers. There is a growing preference, especially at the most selective schools, for high achievers who are also “angular” or “focused” candidates. These successful students typically possess a special activity or unusual characteristic that sets them apart from other applicants. This is commonly referred to as a “hook”. Admissions officers look for quality over quantity. Depth, not breadth, of experience is most important as most colleges now prefer to see fewer activities that really interest you and where you are involved in a significant way. Evidence of passion, leadership, initiative, commitment and making a real difference is critical.

5. Community Service

Few colleges have a community service requirement, but volunteering is considered an excellent venue to show character, compassion, and self-fulfillment through helping others. Evidence of increased responsibility and dedication over time is especially impressive. That said, community service is often a criteria for obtaining scholarships.

6. Work and Entrepreneurial Experiences

Part-time work experience, an internship or summer job, even starting your own business can provide excellent essay material to showcase your maturity, initiative, work ethic as well as interpersonal and time-management skills.