



The Scoop on College

WHAT ARE COLLEGES LOOKING FOR?

A college admissions office wants to see more than just high test scores and grades. How can you separate yourself from the crowd?



RECOMMENDATIONS

A little courtesy can go a long way when requesting letters of recommendation.

- Provide enough time for your teachers (or others) to write the letters.
- Make a formal request; in person, not an e-mail and not a demand
- Supply the person who will be writing the recommendation with as much information as possible. This includes contact info and any materials they may need to complete the recommendation (transcripts, essays, lists of activities, special projects, due dates and any other helpful materials.)
- Send a thank-you letter to the person writing the recommendation.
- Include a self-addressed stamped envelope for their convenience.

- **A rigorous course schedule.** While high school grades and SAT scores are important, a school also wants to see that you have selected challenging courses that will help you grow academically.

- **Genuine interest in THEIR school.** Make concrete connections between what you want out of your education and what that SPECIFIC college or university has to offer.

- **An interest in learning.** Emphasize less on what you want to do when you graduate and more on what you would like to learn while you are a college student.

- **Willingness to lead.** Colleges want students who will enhance their campus community in some special way. Many times, your abilities are best reflected in carefully-chosen extracurricular activities.

And What Should YOU Be Looking For?

- Are there programs of study offered that you are interested in?
- Does the college accept Advanced Placement Tests?
- Do professors teach undergraduate courses, or are teaching assistants the instructors?
- Are faculty members easy to reach outside of class?
- How many students do an internship and is there a service that can help you?
- What computer and other specialized facilities are available for student use?
- Are their extra-curricular activities that you are interested in available?
- What types of housing are available?
- What are some special features of the campus?
- Do most of these students stay on campus during the weekend?

Early Decision/Early Action

“Early Decision”: is a binding agreement stating that you will attend the college or university which accepts you, provided that school offers a reasonable financial aid package. If accepted, you must withdraw any admissions applications sent to other schools.

“Early Action”: allows you to apply early in the fall and receive a response by the middle of December. Early action gives you the opportunity to compare admissions and financial aid offers without committing to one school.

TIP! Early Decision/Early Action is most effective if you have a very strong interest in a school and you can compete with other Early Action applications.



COMMON APPLICATION MISTAKES

Follow the directions:

- If an essay question has more than one section, provide an answer for every part.
- Computer the grade point average according to the instruction. Different schools use different methods of computing GPAs.



Don't leave anything out:

- Before you seal the envelope or click "send" on your computer, double- and triple-check that you have included all of the required parts: essays, application signatures, recommendation letter (s) and any other necessary materials.
- Print out any online forms and keep copies of all paperwork.
- Include a permanent address. The address you use should be one at which the college can contact you anytime during the admissions process.



Other common errors:

- Don't run out of time to complete the application. Give yourself at least two weeks to find mistakes. Plan to submit the application as early as possible.
- When listing activities, don't limit yourself to only activities in high school (Unless that's specified).
- Include work with community organization's volunteer efforts or part-time/full-time work.
- Ask a guidance counselor, teacher or family member to proofread the application and catch any errors. Don't count on your computer's spell-check tool. Words may be spelled correctly but used incorrectly.
- If you're confused by a question or any part of the application, ask someone. A quick call to the admissions office can save you from making an embarrassing error.

TIP! Keep track of your applications by sending them with a certificate of mailing via the U.S. Postal Service.

FINANCIAL AID

GENERAL AID TYPES

Federal Aid: Aid that comes from the U.S. government. This aid is usually disbursed through your college.

Gift Aid: Financial aid that does not need to be paid back:

- Grants: Typically based on financial need.
- Scholarships: Typically based on achievement or talent.

Loans: Funds that must be paid back later, with interest. A loan can be from a private lender (such as a bank) or your college (federal loans are guaranteed by the government).

Private Aid: Financial aid that comes from non-government sources.

Work-Study: Provide students with part-time employment. More under "Federal Work-Study."

FEDERAL AID PROGRAMS

Pell Grant: Gift aid given based on financial need. How much aid you will be eligible to receive is based on your FAFSA results.

Federal Work-Study: Provides jobs for students with financial need, allowing them to earn money to help defray college expenses. Jobs are available both on and off campus.

Perkins Loan: Fixed low interest loan through your college. You must demonstrate financial need.

Stafford Loan: Variable interest rate loan. Stafford loans may be obtained from a private lender or your college. They can be either subsidized (no interest accrues while in school) or unsubsidized (interest accrues while in school.)

TIP! Apply for FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1 your senior year!

FAFSA

What is it?

Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The federal government uses this form to determine your eligibility for financial aid, which includes: grants scholarship, work-study and loans.



FAFSA is FREE!