

31st January

This Will Look Great on my Application... Right?



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Courtesy of slate.com

It's Mardi Gras season which means the sights and sounds of New Orleans are alive everywhere you look. One of the most popular bands in NOLA and a staple of Mardi Gras is Rebirth Brass Band. Rebirth has a popular and ubiquitous song called [Do Whatcha Wanna](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_AOwrXev60) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_AOwrXev60] . Before you dive into this post, go listen to this song because my blog entry today is all about doing whatcha wanna.

Last year, my friend and colleague Ashley Brookshire from the Office of Admission at Georgia Tech posted a great blog called "[But... What Do Colleges Prefer?](https://pwp.gatech.edu/admission-blog/2017/06/14/but-what-do-colleges-prefer/) [https://pwp.gatech.edu/admission-blog/2017/06/14/but-what-do-colleges-prefer/]" I loved this blog because it transparently told high school students that the reality is, when it comes to how you spend your time, we prefer that you do what you want to. As Director of Admission at Tulane, I will be straight up with you: I don't want your experiences in high school to be a constant stream of things you think will look good on your college application. This whole concept of doing stuff to impress admission officers has reached a fever pitch this decade. And the culprit: colleges who have helped create an admission frenzy among high school students.

Now, I want Tulane to be the school that finally pumps the brakes on all this.

Colleges expect you to engage in activities outside the classroom, and that hopefully, you enjoy doing those activities. But what we don't want is you feeling like you need to be doing specific things to impress us. I know that it's really easy as a high school student to dwell on the past and worry about the future. What we want here is for you to experience high school as it comes. Take advantage of the experiences and opportunities for growth that happen when you are 16 and stop constantly worrying what colleges think of you.

Let me break it down further. Here are ten things I want you to remember as you experience, I mean really *experience*, your time in high school.

We don't expect you to cure cancer or impress the CFO of Morgan Stanley. I see a lot of great applicants who

have done some pretty incredible research or amazing internships. That is great! If you have your sights set on medical school one day and research experience is something that you think will help you decide on that career path, then, by all means, do it. But don't feel like your application will be lacking if it doesn't have impressive research or internship experiences. Also... you're teenagers! No one can expect you to be mapping the human genome or starting your own business. If you actually end up cleaning beakers or taking people's Starbucks orders during these experiences, that's fine too. In fact, that's actually what I would expect a high school intern or research assistant to be doing. I've read applications where students have said they learned how to administer anesthesia or perform heart surgery. Maybe they actually have, but if I were about to go under the knife, I would rather not see a high school student with a scalpel next to my hospital bed.

We don't expect that you've traveled the world and solved the planet's problems. Travel can expand your mind and completely change your outlook. Doing community service for those around the world is a spectacular way to give back while enjoying your time abroad. Keep in mind though, some of the most meaningful service projects are right in your own back yard. We live in a country of great wealth inequality and if serving your community is your passion, consider the amazing opportunities you might have to help those in need—right in your own hometown. Our hope is not that you are helping your community because you think it will impress Tulane. Rather, the goal is that you authentically have a passion for service and are doing good things for good people.

It's okay if you are doing something just because. If you love to read, cook, surf, meditate, DJ, or something else—let us know! Yes, we do expect that you have done something more substantial than just reading a few books, but don't completely sideline your passions. Just because you think a college might value certain experiences over others, it's not worth it to stop doing the things you're passionate about. An applicant who reads 20 books for pleasure during their senior year, will add way more to a college classroom than someone who takes a class at a local college just because they think it will impress me. Why? Because you are doing something you love and have a passion for. Caveat: if "doing whatcha wanna" is watching Netflix or online shopping—that might not be something worth sharing in the application process.

We believe in the humble job. A student who works at Chipotle or Starbucks or Pier One or Sprinkles Cupcakes or Jamba Juice knows about time management, communication skills, problem solving, and humility. Again, I don't want you to get a job because it looks good for colleges, but frankly, the skillset you'll develop at a job will prepare you nicely for college. You'll make some money, learn some great skills and as an added bonus, stand out in the application process. If I am being one-hundred percent honest: having a job IS something that impresses the admission team at Tulane.

We don't expect a laundry list of extracurricular activities. Here is what we want: a somewhat brief list of the things you love to do, the things you do well, and the things you might continue when you arrive on our campus in the fall. My job is not to find well-rounded students. My job is to build a well-rounded class of students. Don't feel like you need to load up on every club or organization your school has. We don't need or want that.

We're impressed with things that you think won't impress us. And honestly, we've seen it all. I get the sense that our applicants are doing some of these big-name extracurricular activities to stand out. For better or worse, everyone is doing many of the same things. They are great activities, don't get me wrong. But because we see so many great applicants with great resumes, as it turns out, some activities are not as memorable as they may seem. If you are doing these things because you love to, that is great. And that is WHY you should be doing them. Worry less about if you think we'll be impressed and just enjoy and learn from the experience. If you were to ask me about the most memorable activities I have seen from students, I honestly can only truly remember one and that was an incredible applicant who had hiked the entire Pacific Crest Trail. So basically what I am saying is the only way to stand out these days is to hike 2,600 miles from Canada to Mexico.

Consider a summer program on a college campus. Just remember, many schools aren't going to give you a leg up simply because you attended their summer program. Doing a summer program is a great way to get a feel for life in college: living in the residence halls, getting a sampling of academics, learning the pros and cons of living away from your parents. These are all valuable insights that will help you adjust to college once you get there. But, don't just say "oh I should go to Duke's summer program so I have better shot at getting into Duke." It doesn't work that way. Instead, research programs that you actually believe will allow you to learn, grow, and enrich your summer. Shameless plug: we have awesome programs at Tulane for STEM, research, women's leadership, and architecture. [Check them out \[https://summer.tulane.edu/pre-college\]](https://summer.tulane.edu/pre-college) !

We expect that you'll do some research and engage with us. So, there is one thing we DO think looks good in the application process: students who have taken the time to research what Tulane is all about and authentically engage with us. Again, think less "what are the boxes that Tulane wants me to check?" And more, "what are the steps I can take to genuinely find out if Tulane will be a great fit for me?" Come meet us if we visit your high school or take the time to [chat with our current students \[https://tulane.welcometocollege.com/\]](https://tulane.welcometocollege.com/) or simply [join our mailing list \[http://here.tulane.edu/\]](http://here.tulane.edu/) . Don't feel like you have to email me [five times \[http://tuadmissionjeff.blogspot.com/2012/09/five-e-mails-you-should-never-send.html\]](http://tuadmissionjeff.blogspot.com/2012/09/five-e-mails-you-should-never-send.html) and demonstrate your interest in nine different ways. What we really want is for you to find out if Tulane is somewhere you'll be happy and if so, let us know in your application. Speaking of happy...

We want you to be happy. The college admission process should not define you. We want you to take a step back and realize that at the end of the day, your personal contentment and self-confidence are the most important parts of growing up. High school is always going to have its ups and downs. The more you can be in the moment and eliminate the constant ruminating about the past or anxiety for the future, the happier you'll be. I know it's easier said than done, but take a moment to BE in the moment and not worry about what we think of you.

We want you to be good people. I've always loved the ["Check This Box if You're a Good Person" \[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/04/opinion/check-this-box-if-youre-a-good-person.html\]](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/04/opinion/check-this-box-if-youre-a-good-person.html) article written by Rebecca Sabky from Dartmouth. We get these beautifully packaged applications chock-full of inspiring extracurricular activities, but at the end of the day, it's nearly impossible to tell what type of person you are based on a college application. I love reading recommendation letters about students who treat the cafeteria people with kindness and respect. Or the compassion some students show to kids outside of their friend group. These are the important things you do when you think no one, and no college, is looking.

At the end of the day, do whatcha wanna. Do what makes you happy, what improves your life and the lives of those around you. Try not to worry so much about what you think a group of strangers in a school far away will think. What you'll end up finding is that you'll be leading a much more fulfilled life, one that allows you to live in the moment, have joy, and one that allows you time... to do whatcha wanna.

Posted 31st January by [Jeff Schiffman](#)

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