



How Colleges Evaluate Applicants

The college admissions process can be overwhelming, complicated and unclear; it contains a good dose of subjectivity and mystery. As a result, potential applicants are often unsure about why one candidate might get admitted and another does not.

Let's take a look at what colleges consider important and how they decide whom they will admit.

Strength of High School Program: This, by far, is of the most importance to admissions counselors. They investigate whether or not students have been challenging themselves consistently and if their education has remained a priority. Has the student taken a strong college preparatory high school program? Have they taken Lab Sciences? What about Mathematics courses through Trigonometry and perhaps Calculus? Have they taken any advanced level classes: Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Honors classes or College level courses? Did they take courses aligned to their career interest? How many years of Foreign Language did they complete? These are the questions they will use to determine the rigor of a student's program as they compare this student to the applicants from the same high school, geographic area and finally, across the country.

Students often ask if it better to do well in an easier level class or receive a lower grade in a higher-level class and here is the answer. Colleges would rather see a slightly lower grade in an advanced level class, i.e. a B in a college level course rather than an A in a less rigorous class. This choice demonstrates that the student decided to work harder in this class and take on a challenge. This type of student displays a stronger work ethic and is better prepared for the challenges they will face on the collegiate level.

Grade Point Average: This is another subjective factor. High schools vary tremendously in the way they compute a grade point average. Some high schools give extra weighting to advanced level classes, Honors classes and even Regents level classes and some do not. College Admission Officers know that this creates a discrepancy in how each grade point average is computed. They often will recalculate a student's grade point average using their own formula to create a level-playing field between differing high schools. After this, grade point averages are compared, factoring in the strength of the program for admissions and scholarship purposes.

Activity Profile: Students who have a record of substantial extracurricular activities are sought-after candidates. They have proven that they are able to handle a strong academic

curriculum in addition to remaining active in their school and community. These are the type of students who will contribute to a diverse, well-rounded college community.

Essay: Here is an opportunity to show another side of the student profile. What does the candidate stand for and what defines them? This information should be reflected in an authentic, creative manner. The essay component can influence an evaluation to either side of the decision-making process.

There are automatic admits for outstanding students as well as automatic denials for those who are not close to admissions standards. What factors serve as tipping points for those in the “Maybe” pile?

Legacy factor: A close relative that is an alumnus of the college.

First generation college student: Neither parent graduated from college.

Evaluation of writing supplements: All writing supplements should be well written.

Evidence of Demonstrated Interest: How has the student shown interest in this particular school? This is demonstrated by college visits, opportunities for an interview, and visits to Open Houses, college fairs and staff that visit the high school every fall.

Interview: An evaluative interview plays a factor in the decision-making process.

Social media accounts and Google searches: Make sure privacy settings are in place and check the accounts.

Adversity: Has the applicant overcome some sort of adversity or challenge and how is this information reflected?

The good news is that colleges are looking for reasons to admit qualified candidates. Prospective applicants can sway the odds in their favor by recognizing the factors of importance in the decision-making process and being proactive in shaping their profile early in the process!