

COLLEGE BOUND

Helpful tips for getting into college and the smartest ways to pay for it.

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Do Extracurricular Activities Really Matter?

Colleges do consider after-school life when evaluating applicants

As a new crop of high school students consider their next few years and the college application process, it's important to reflect on some of the common wisdom circulating about what colleges look for in an applicant.

Students will hear from parents, teachers and guidance counselors that it's important to stay involved throughout the high school years, in either sports, leadership groups, through volunteering opportunities or with other extracurricular options. The reason being is that college like applicants who have more to show that just academic performance.

But is it true? Do extracurricular activities really matter all that much when applying for acceptance to a college or university?

The simple answer is Yes.

Colleges and universities do seek out applicants that can show extracurricular activity involvement. They don't really have any special opinion about whether it's more important to play football, or lead the high school Key Club, but they do want to see that a student has initiative, is committed to an interest or passion, and that they stay involved in their school, community or church. As long as you can show that you put yourself out there, that's really what counts.

The reason colleges like to see extracurricular involvement is that it predicts how a student will behave throughout their college years and beyond. Colleges want to know that incoming students will continue to lead, and to support their school through activities, teams and through other opportunities. Extracurricular involvement also gives schools some

indicators that you may remain active with your school alumni club later in life. And that's something all colleges and universities want from their former students.

So what activities should high school students seek? As stated above, they aren't necessarily looking to see that you played a sport, joined a social club and ran for student office. What they want to know is what interests you, and did you make the effort to do more with your high school years than perfect your video game performance and take the SATs.

With that in mind, it's important for students to join groups, clubs or teams that truly interest them. If your son doesn't have much interest in playing football, than encourage him to look for other options, such as a volunteer activity, or taking a leadership role in the school. If your daughter doesn't find anything at

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Spotlight On Bard College



Location: Annandale on Hudson, New York

Type: Independent, Co-Ed

Undergraduates: 1,958 undergraduates (57 percent women, 43 percent men)

Setting: Rural 600-acre campus

Entrance Difficulty: Very difficult, 35 percent of applicants admitted. 60 percent of matriculating students ranked in the top 10 percent of their high school class.

Cost of Attendance: \$55,592 (full time tuition, room and board and mandatory fees)

Student Life: 74 percent live on campus

Popular Programs Include: Biological and Biomedical Studies, Business Management and Marketing, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Social Sciences, Legal Professions and Studies, Pre-Medical Studies, Arts-based programs.

Testing: The mid 50% range for the SAT: critical reading 640-740; math 590-680 and the mid 50% range for the ACT: 29-31.

Fun Facts:

- On campus housing is required through sophomore year
- Founded in 1860 as St. Stephen's College
- The campus overlooks the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains and is within the Hudson River Historic District
- Bard is an SAT, ACT optional school
- Notable Alumni include Blythe Danner, Gabby Hoffmann, Chevy Chase and Donald Fagen of Steely Dan.
- International students represent 13 percent of the student body
- Undergraduates must create a senior project for graduation, based in their major. The project could be a lengthy paper of 80 or so pages, or creating and implementing recitals and other major-focused events.
- The *Princeton Review* ranked Bard College as the second most liberal college in the United States.

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school that she might like to pursue, she could seek activities outside of school, such as through youth and recreation leagues, or by joining her church youth group or community theatre.

Try to think of diverse opportunities that showcase your child's personality and interests. Even intended science majors may have a keen interest in theatre or the arts. If so, be sure to showcase that through extracurricular activities. Finding a balance of school activities, and outside activities also shows colleges that you're willing to step outside your comfort zone, and participate in an activity even when your best friend isn't involved.

Other extracurricular activity tips:

- Don't force your child to join a specific club or organization. Instead, give them the option of finding something they like and are interested in pursuing. You may notice how much easier it is for them to show up for meetings, games or practices if the idea to join was all their idea.
- Parents often think their children need to participate in a variety of activities, but colleges don't necessarily want well-rounded *students*, they want a well-rounded student *body*. You offer more value to the college if you're a master at something, rather than a jack-of-all-trades.
- Colleges like to see community involvement, especially through volunteer activities. Your local library, museum, or art gallery may have volunteer opportunities

available to high school students.

- Some colleges like to see that students have a special area of interest, such as they're all about science, or all about working with kids. They also seek out students who show entrepreneurial skills by starting their own business, or by writing a book or E-book on a topic of interest to them.
- Be sure to highlight on the college application involvement in non-traditional activities, such as rock climbing, training horses, or writing and performing a concerto or folk song.
- Schools like to see dedication on the part of a student. Finding an interest or joining a particular club and staying with it throughout high school can certainly demonstrate a student's ability to commit, and dedicate himself to something outside of academics.
- Students who can demonstrate leadership skills often have an advantage when applying to college. Did your child join the Future Business Leaders of America club, or did he start the club, obtain the charter and find the faculty advisor to sponsor it?
- Students should keep track of all of their activities, work and volunteer hours throughout high school, so that when the time comes to apply, they'll have a record of what they did and when, and it's much easier to account for your accomplishments if you have them written down for easy reference.



A Little Known Backdoor Into College

As competition for college admissions increases, even exceptional students may find that the school of their choice, or even their “safety” school, may not have room for them in the fall. Other students who show academic promise, but may have fallen short on test scores, may also be disappointed when college acceptance letters are mailed.

Receiving a rejection letter can be devastating, but many students who find rejection letters from the school of their choice have found that there may be one more option for them that their high school guidance counselor never told them about.

It goes by the name “General Studies.” While there may be no room for you at a university’s College of Arts and Sciences, there may be a spot for you at the school’s College of General Studies.

Not available at all colleges and universities, General Studies programs have been around for decades, but gained popularity in the United States in the 1980s and 90s.

Originally intended as an undergraduate or associate’s degree for students who returned to college after an absence of years or decades, the general studies program was created to give students flexibility to design much of their own curriculum, without having to fulfill the requirements of a specific major.

Many schools and universities offer General Studies programs, as well as junior colleges and state adult education programs. More recently, students have also had the option to pursue an associate’s or bachelor’s degree in General Studies online.

The programs have evolved over the years, and students today find that enrolling in a General Studies program may provide a backdoor to the school of their choice. Less competitive than other programs, students who pursue General Studies can often transition as a junior to another department.

General Studies programs will vary from school to school, but many programs tend to be liberal arts intensive and interdisciplinary – with less emphasis on testing and more on writing and group study. Schools that offer a two-year program in General Studies find that students tend to stay on to pursue their bachelor’s degree.

Of course, pursuing a General Studies degree may not be the right choice for every student, but it’s something to consider for students who think they might be on the borderline when colleges write their acceptance letters. The programs may also be an option for students who are wait listed, or who are on the fence about whether or not they want to attend college at all.

News You Can Use

The Scholarship Hunt - Unusual Options Abound

For many college students, financial aid and scholarship money are relied upon to help pay the hefty price tag of higher education. While straight-A students, outstanding athletes and other standouts are likely candidates for certain scholarships, that doesn’t mean that other soon-to-be college students don’t have options in finding scholarship assistance.

It’s true that scholarship money is out there, and that you don’t have to have a 4.2 GPA or a perfect 2400 on the SATs to qualify. In fact, there are numerous unusual scholarships available to students who may think they wouldn’t be in the running for any awards.

When considering unusual scholarships, look to your child’s interests, passions, unusual achievements and family background. The scholarships below are real, and may give you some insight into what’s available to students who are willing to apply, and give it a shot.

Duck Tape’s Stuck at Prom Scholarship Contest - You may have heard about this unusual scholarship that challenges students to create and accessorize their prom outfits with duct tape -- and then wear them to the prom.

Vegetarian Resource Group - this group awards two \$5,000 scholarships to high school students who have promoted vegetarianism in their communities.

The FBI Common Knowledge Challenge - This award grants \$250 to high school students who win a quiz contest about the FBI.

Scholarships for the Tall and Not-so-Tall - You wouldn’t think that there are scholarships out there that recognize a person’s height, but there are. In addition to the Tall Clubs International scholarship (which awards money to tall students who meet the organization’s height requirements), there’s also The Billy Barton Foundation Scholarship. This foundation awards money to persons who are short in stature. You must be shorter than 4 feet 10 inches in order to apply.

The National Make it Yourself with Wool Competition - If you have a daughter or a son who’s into fabrics this could be the scholarship opportunity for you. To enter, you must make a garment out of 100 percent wool, or a 60 percent wool blend.

American Association of Candy Technologists - This is a scholarship opportunity for any student who loves the art of making confectioneries. To apply, students need a “demonstrated interest in confectionery technology” along with a strong GPA.

The American Society for Enology and Viticulture - offers scholarships to science students with a passion for wine making.

And The National Beef Ambassador Program - offers up to \$2,500 to students who can give a great speech about the merits of cows.



Ask the Professor

Q: Are colleges really that concerned about senior grades?

A: Yes. With more and more high school students taking AP and Honors courses, colleges monitor your grades closely, because they see these courses as an indicator of how you will handle college level courses. In the "old days," you could more or less coast once your acceptance came through. Today, with the increased competition, colleges are much more strict and unforgiving about "senioritis."

Did You Know?



- ✓ At age 21, women are more likely to be enrolled in college than men, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- ✓ This difference in college enrollment rates stems from three factors:
 1. women were more likely to have graduated from high school;
 2. among high school graduates, women were more likely to attend college; and
 3. once enrolled in college, women were less likely than men to leave college between school years.

College Match Game



What college did James Franco attend?

- A) University of San Francisco
- B) Harvard
- C) Georgetown
- D) UCLA

Answer: Franco earned his bachelor's degree from the University of California, Los Angeles.



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