

College Wise

Inside the Admissions Office:

How College Applications Are Evaluated

April 17, 2023

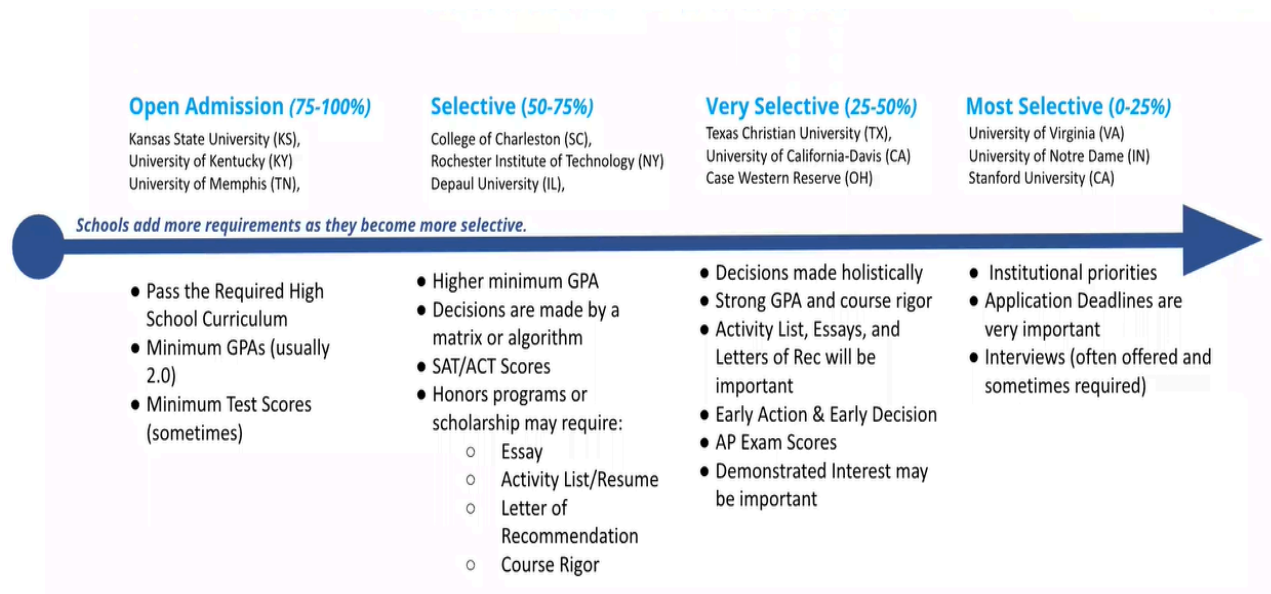
Playback available [HERE](#)

Presenters: College Wise Counselors

- Caitlin Harper
Previously: Attended and worked for Lewis & Clark and then pursued a position at Willamette.
- Breanna Heinrz
Previously - Undergraduate Admissions Officer at MIT and Swarthmore
- Ashley Meyer-
Previously - Attended the University of South Carolina for her undergrad, Harvard for her Master's, and worked in admissions at Georgia Tech.

Notes:

School Selectivity Determines Admissions Review Process:



Selective College Admissions is a VERY Human Process (13:00)

- It's prone to mistakes, biases, and bad moods
- It's also open to connections, stories, and relationships
- Average Admissions Officers (AO):
 - White female
 - Age 20s-40s
 - Know your audience (AO)
 - In most cases, an application decision is made by multiple people.

Academics: Courses and Grades (15:41)

- The number 1 question AOs ask themselves is "Can the student do the work?"
- AOs evaluate students in the context from which they're coming from
 - [High School Profile](#) tells what your school offers, and your high school transcript shows which opportunities you took advantage of.
 - What opportunities have been afforded to you that you took advantage of?
- AOs look to see if you're taking classes in the area you plan to major
 - Where are you choosing to have rigor in your schedule? That matters!
 - The point is NOT to take every advanced class but to push rigor where you can
 - You want a balanced schedule where you can maintain grades, sanity, health, and extracurriculars.
- You don't need to be perfect-there is NO perfect!
- Transcripts are the most significant part of your academic evaluation at any college-selective or not.
- Your transcript (performance in high school) is most predictive of your success in college.

Standardized Testing (21:00)

- Test FREE-AOs will not consider testing even if you send your scores
- If an institution is test-optional and you want to see what admitted scores were of students who got accepted Google
 - "(College name) admitted student profile"
 - "(College name) admitted SAT."
 - "(College name) admitted ACT."

- Just like your transcript is evaluated in context to your school, so are your test scores
- Everything is in context.

Extracurriculars (26:30)

- Extracurriculars are more inclusive of how you spend your time!
 - It isn't WHAT you do, it's WHY you do it
 - It isn't WHEN you do it; it's WHY you do it.

Ah ha Moment: Why do you spend so much time playing video games?

- He gets to think creatively and problem-solve in ways he doesn't get to in school.
- He has met a broad and diverse group of people he wouldn't have met otherwise.
- He feels most comfortable in that space, and he pushes himself when he's in that space.

Why do Extracurriculars Matter? (29:00)

- You aren't just a student when you go to college
- Going to college is a way of life
 - Colleges are trying to build community as much as they are trying to create smart thinkers and contributors in the classroom.
 - What you're doing now is an important indication of what kind of community member and contributor you will be in college.
- Students with solid activity lists are the ones that stand out in an application review process.
 - They're the ones who have chosen clear, intentional activities and can speak about their passion and authenticity.

Advice for Creating an Activities List That Stands Out (30:40)

- Colleges intentionally limit how many activities you can share
 - Common App allows 10
- Have clear, Intentional activities
 - They tell stories and speak to the motivation for doing those actions with passion and authenticity.
 - They help you find the dots, and connect the dots to what you're doing now and what you hope to do in college.
- Be strategic-list the MOST important activities.

- List the activities that have impacted you, and you've had an impact on it FIRST.
- Description space is limited (150 characters), and AOs are smart. They don't need you to explain what "it" is. They know what Biology Club is! Talk about your role in the club and how you made a difference.
 - Make it a meaningful, intentional story about how you spend your time.

Essays (33:30)

- Your essay should be a meaningful, intentional story
- AOs read a LOT of essays during application season; the reality is, they're probably going to read your statement and essay in 3-5 minutes!
 - "Read" is probably more like a skim
 - Hopefully, this info relieves some pressure

Personal Statement (35:30)

- Your conclusion is probably the "most" important part of your essay
 - What do you want to communicate? Communicate that clearly.
- Have a clear message.
 - Ask your family/friends/teachers/boss/etc. What is their favorite story about you is
- Use your OWN voice
 - Read your essay aloud
 - AOs can tell when it's not your voice (and someone else has written it for you)
 - Make sure your essay is something you can read and talk through with your favorite teacher at school.

Supplemental Essays (39:30)

- Through supplemental essays, colleges are telling you something about what they believe in, who they are, or what kind of student they're looking for.
 - Don't miss an opportunity to show that you did your research and you're a good match.
 - Example 1: The mission of Harvard College is to educate our students to be **citizens and citizen leaders** for society. What do you do to **contribute to classmates' lives** and advance this mission?

- Example 2: In the age of social media, what does **engaging with integrity** look like for you? (Emory University)
- Example 3: Tell us about a **peer who has made a difference** in your life. (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

Letters of Recommendation (41:17)

- Start building relationships early with your teachers and your counselor

Letters of Recommendation

- Importance varies by university
- Vary by high school
 - Read in context
 - Large Public School vs. Well-resourced Independent Schools
- Letters are generally always going to communicate that a student is somewhere on the scale from satisfactory to once in a lifetime.
- The best letters give personal anecdotes and specific stories of student success. Thus, get to know your teachers and counselors!
- Advice: The best letters give personal anecdotes and stories that show the students within the context
 - Your teachers and counselors must know you for this to come out in a letter.

Highly Selective Holistic Admissions (47:00)

- Highly selective = highly rejected
- Highly selective means that less than 20% of students get in
- No one part of your application will get you in or keep you out
- Ultimately, can you do the work?
- They look at you in context to the other applications and your academics, who you are, where you are coming from, what opportunities you have been afforded in life, and what you have done with that.
- The Ivy Leagues combined only accepted around 14,536 students
 - There are about 34,000 high schools in the US so that means that there are 34,000 valedictorians.
 - Even all Valedictorians can't get in!

- While it's a great accomplishment, it doesn't make you stand out at these institutions.
- It comes down to:
 - Who are you?
 - What kind of human being are you going to be on our campus?
 - What are you going to contribute extracurricularly?
 - What type of roommate are you going to be?
 - Are you a nice person?
 - Personality is very important
 - They are choosing people who are different from one another so they can craft an intentional class based on the university's needs
- Lead with what you can control.

Selective Public Schools (53:40)

- In-state and out-of-state balance
 - There's a mandate law: they have to select specific numbers of in-state students.