



December

College Admission Criteria

Students who are considering college may wonder what colleges look for in an applicant. When deciding which students to admit to their college, admissions officers look at many different factors. Listed below are the main criteria:

Balanced Schedule

One of the factors that college admissions officers look for is a rigorous class schedule. Colleges want students who are willing to challenge themselves. ***One important thing to note, however, is not to be overloaded by selecting too many difficult classes.*** Students should find a **balance** between challenging themselves but not overwhelming themselves to the point that it backfires and they struggle in all classes. Counselors will meet with students sometime in January or February to help plan their course schedules for the following school year.

Grades

While a challenging schedule may hold a little more precedence, grades are still very important to colleges. Therefore, it is key that students keep their grades in check throughout their entire high school career. If a student thinks that it's okay to slack off a little bit during the senior year, this student should think again. Colleges require a final transcript (record of academic achievement in high school) be sent upon graduation so they can do a final review of a student's high school progress. Many colleges have been known to revoke their offers of admission to students who suffer from "senioritis" (slacking off in the senior year).

Standardized Test Scores (ex. SAT or ACT)

Many colleges do take admissions test scores into consideration, although the COVID pandemic has changed the admissions policies of some schools. Some colleges require test scores for admission, some require them only for scholarship consideration, and some don't require them at all. College websites and admission materials often list the average test scores of students at a college or university or a range that shows the scores of the middle 50 percent of the students who attend the school. It is wise to check with each individual college a student is considering in order to determine test policies.

Extracurricular Activities

Involvement in extracurricular activities shows admissions officers that a student is well-rounded and has good time management skills. Colleges want students who are going to be involved with activities on their campus. Keep in mind, however, that one should not join a bunch of activities just to fill up his/her high school resume. Admissions officers are looking for quality over quantity. Students should pick a few activities that really interest him/her and become fully involved in them. It looks better on a high school resume when one can say he/she organized a fundraiser for the science club, rather than just being a member of the club.

Application Essay

The college application essay allows a student to show his/her uniqueness to admissions officers. Counselors look for application essays that are honest and provide supplemental information. Students should not restate the information found on their transcript and application. Instead, students should write about their desires, goals, special events in their life, etc. The essay is an opportunity for a student to personalize the application and express him/herself in a way that he/she cannot in the rest of the application. Admissions officers are not looking for a particular "correct answer" on the essay. They want to find out what students are like as individuals.

The essay is a demonstration of a student's writing ability, which is a key component of success in college. Students should be sure to use the principles of good writing, such as developing a logical essay structure, checking grammar, and proofreading carefully.

Letters of Recommendation

Admissions officers rely on letters of recommendation to let them know how others view a student. Students should be sure to pick their recommenders wisely. It is important that these people know the student well enough to provide valuable insight about him/her. They will be asked about a student's intellectual strengths, personality, and activities outside of school. If a recommender doesn't know a student that well, it will show through his/her letter.

**Adapted from ecampustours.com.*

Factors In The College Admission Decision

Below is a table that provides a complete overview of the relative importance of factors in the admissions decision. Grades in core courses and strength of curriculum were considered by colleges to be the top factors in the admission decision, followed by character attributes and essay.

PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2023

	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
High school grades in college prep courses	185	76.8	15.1	4.9	3.2
Total high school grades (all courses)	185	74.1	18.9	5.4	1.6
Strength of high school curriculum	185	63.8	22.7	10.3	3.2
Positive character attributes	184	28.3	37.5	18.5	15.8
Essay or writing sample	185	18.9	37.3	26.5	17.3
Student's Interest in attending	185	15.7	27.6	25.4	31.4
Counselor recommendation	185	11.9	40.0	27.6	20.5
Teacher recommendation	185	10.8	40.5	28.1	20.5
Extracurricular activities	185	6.5	44.3	30.8	18.4
High school class rank	183	5.5	22.4	43.2	29.0
Admission test scores (ACT, SAT)	185	4.9	25.4	38.9	30.8
Portfolio	185	4.9	10.8	24.3	60.0
Interview	185	4.3	8.6	32.4	54.6
Work	185	2.2	30.8	40.0	27.0
State graduation exam scores	185	1.6	6.5	18.4	73.5
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	185	1.1	22.2	25.9	50.8

Planning for College

Listed below are some of the things that parents of college-bound sophomores should talk with their students about.

- Recommend they take academic courses *appropriate to their abilities* and the resources of the school and community. Again, students will be scheduling for classes as early as late January, so these conversations are only a few months off.
- Encourage involvement in meaningful extracurricular activities and community service. Depth in a few areas is more valuable than a long list of superficial memberships.
- Together, assess and discuss family finances and values that might affect college choice. Feel free to visit <http://www.studentaid.gov> for helpful information to understand the college financial aid process.
- Encourage use of college websites to investigate schools of interest.
- For schools of interest, the student should register as a prospective student through websites and receive further information.
- Visit college campuses. These visits may be independently scheduled, or as a part of family vacations and trips.
- Emphasize time management, organization skills, and good study habits.

For students who desire to get a jump start on the college research process, here are some helpful websites:

- Naviance - <https://student.naviance.com/zeelandhs> (all ZHS students have login credentials for this website)
- CollegeBoard – <http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>
- College Navigator - <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>