

7 Things Colleges Are Looking for Today

This blog post summarizes some great insights from "The Well-Rounded Student" chapter in our Academic Success Formula book.

Students have many factors to consider when making a choice of college. Besides just having the required GPA, family expectations and personal interests also play a large role. So how should students decide where to go? College can also be an expensive investment that places added pressure on both students and parents. Furthermore, because of the large number of college applicants these days, the admission process (especially for top rated universities) can be quite competitive. But don't get discouraged! Colleges look at many factors when reviewing applicants, and students should consider all of them when choosing a school. So without further ado, here are Tutor Doctor's seven things colleges are looking for today!

1) Grades and Upward Trend

Grades may be the most obvious factor that comes to mind when considering colleges, but it doesn't necessarily mean getting "straight A's" or a 4.0 GPA. Colleges are also looking for an upward trend of improvement. For instance – let's say a student receives a "C" in Algebra I, a "B" in Geometry, and finally an "A" in Algebra II by senior year. To colleges, this looks really good – it shows the student has made an active effort at improving their skills, and their grades reflect this.

2) Class Rigor

Students that choose to take more rigorous classes also gain an extra edge in the admission process. It's a good idea to take tougher classes, even if you don't get a perfect grade. Colleges recognize that AP (Advanced Placement) classes are significantly harder, and as a result weigh them more heavily. In fact, AP classes offer an extra grade point – which is how some students are able to reach GPAs above the 4.0 mark.

3) Quality Involvement in Extracurricular Activities Both In and Out of School

Extracurricular activities show that the student has gone above and beyond to become involved in the education process. This includes both electives in school (student government, clubs, leadership) as well as off-campus activities (athletics, volunteer work, community service). For more information, check out our blog “Choosing Extracurricular Activities That Will Appeal to Colleges.”

4) Strong Record of Community Service

Instead of having hours and hours of various community service, colleges prefer to see students that focus on a specific mission. For example – if you love animals, having a strong record of volunteer service at your local animal shelter is going to look fantastic to any college.

5) Recommendations From Teachers and Community Leaders

Written recommendations from members of your community go a long way with college applications. This shows that another respected member of the community is willing to vouch for your character. Most commonly, students go to their teachers for these recommendations, but community leaders are also a good choice.

6) Test Scores

Whether you take the SAT or the ACT, having appropriate test scores is a large factor when applying to most colleges. Standardized tests examine the knowledge a student has gained throughout high school, and many universities place a decent amount of weight on these scores.

7) Personal Statement

Your personal statement is not only a chance to showcase your excellent writing skills, but also gives colleges a look into your personality and who you are as a person. This is also a great time to tie in your academic and community efforts. Like our previous example, a student that uses their personal statement to discuss their passion for animals – and then has a record of animal shelter volunteer hours to go along with it – is going to gain a serious edge over the competition. When it comes down to it, colleges want to see motivated and dedicated applicants with specific goals in mind.