



Selective College Admissions

Realities of Selective Admissions

- For colleges and universities that are considered “selective”, most or nearly all applicants have an academic profile that would make them admissible
 - However, there are many more applicants vs. spaces in the freshman class
 - Selective admissions admit students not based solely on strong academic performance but also compelling personal characteristics and the contributions an applicant could bring to the college

Realities of Selective Admissions

- This is a subjective process
 - It not “plug & chug” – there is no formula
 - It is based on human elements: emotion, opinion, perspective, bias, experience
 - Admissions Offices are looking to build a community for the college
 - It is possible that applicants with the top academic credentials are not admitted if they aren’t seen as contributing members of the campus community

Holistic Review

Things you can control

- Academics
- Community Engagement
- Recommendations
- Application
 - Essay
 - Supplements
- Demonstrated Interest

Things you can't control

- Applicant pool
 - How many apps?
 - How many spots in the incoming class?
 - Percentage taken in Early
- Institutional priorities
 - Weight of hooks
 - Change by year
 - Change by college by college



Application Review

- You have a relatively short time to make a strong impression
 - Most admissions officers will spend 7-15 minutes reviewing your application
 - Prioritize the information you want them to know
 - Academic ability
 - Campus contribution
 - Leadership ability
 - Specific skills
 - Interest in community
 - While they will read everything in your file, the more that is there means the less time they can spend reviewing it
 - Limit additional letters of recommendation
 - If submitting a resume, make it concise
 - Supplement information should be limited
 - Samples of a portfolio – not a whole portfolio
 - Research paper summary/abstract – not the entire research paper

Demonstrating Interest

- It can vary from college to college
 - Some schools don't strongly consider demonstrated interest at all while others weigh an applicant's interest as a significant application component
 - Colleges/Universities want to know that you understand them and appreciate what makes them unique
 - They want to know that an applicant will seriously consider an offer of admission

Demonstrating Interest during COVID-19

- Ways to demonstrate interest (even during COVID-19)
 - Register/attend virtual information sessions
 - Register/attend virtual campus tours
 - Register/attend student panels and Q&As
 - Register/attend open houses this Fall
 - Join mailing lists
 - Email questions to admissions officers
 - Connect with current students over email
 - Check out social media accounts
 - Admissions Officer/Alumni interview



Interviewing – Do's

- Have questions prepared for the end of the interview
 - 2 or 3 meaningful questions
- Take time to process and organize thoughts when answering questions
- Have answers prepared for the typical questions:
 - Tell me about yourself
 - Why are you interested in (INCH)?
 - What are you interested in studying at X and why?
- Be presentable and present
 - At least from the waist up
 - Turn off phone, Apple Watch, anything that makes noise
- If the interview is your first point of contact (aka you haven't attended an info session yet), you will need to do A LOT of research beforehand



Interviewing – Don'ts

- Ask questions that can be easily answered through your own research
- Be afraid of silence
 - You don't want to start rambling and then not successfully finish a thought
- Think that a "yes/no" question is really "yes/no"
- Try to squeeze too much information into one answer
- Forget to focus on the school you're talking to:
 - Don't put another school down
 - Don't talk about another school

Ways to Stand Out

- Demonstrate “genuine” interest
 - Substantial, non–superficial interactions
 - Quality of touch points vs. Quantity of touch points
- Be in the driver’s seat
 - Make the appointment
 - Handle all communication
 - Ask the questions
- Be sincere and authentic in essay and supplements
- Respond to every personal message from an admissions officer
- Provide explanations for school specific/related activities
 - Explain all acronyms
- “Thank You” emails
- Have a strong answer to the question: “Why INCH?”

A Strong “Why INCH?” Answer

Good things to include

- Specific information about an academic program
- Specific information about an opportunity
- Specific information about an aspect of student life
- Specific information about a unique characteristic/tradition

Not good things to include

- General information – even if it matches what you’re looking for in a school
 - School size
 - Class size
 - Location
 - Just having a program or opportunity
 - “You guys have a good program”

Special Case: Family Legacy

- 😊 = I’m interested in your school for x, y, and z ...and because my parent went here.
- ☹️ = I’m interested in your school because my parent went here and liked their experience.

Common Mistakes

- Being remembered for the wrong reasons...
 - Unprofessional email addresses
 - Use your Sidwell email
 - Don't use a parent email
 - Your tone in your essay and communications is too casual
 - Admission decisions are not typically based on grammar or spelling, but it can all add up quickly
 - Unnecessary and/or incessant communication
 - Interactions with other staff besides admissions counselor
 - This can include both you and the rest of your party

Common Mistakes

- Be careful with humor...
 - If you aren't funny, don't try to be funny
 - If you're funny, be funny
 - Make sure other people agree that you're funny
 - If your humor is based on sarcasm, very be careful
 - You don't know who your audience is
- Do not doing something to "just check the box"
 - There is no "if I do x, y, and z, then I get in" option unless specifically mentioned on a website
- There is no system to game so be genuine

Common Misconceptions

- Timeline
 - Pay attention to deadlines
 - Getting your app in earlier means you're more interested
 - Unless it's rolling admission
 - Having a complete app by a deadline can be make or break
- Gimmicks
 - There is a misconception that to stand out, you must do something to "wow" that nobody else has or will do
 - Composing/performing a song about your interest in a college/university - no
 - A baby picture of you at your parent's college' reunion as an indicator of lifelong interest – nope
 - Don't send gifts – bribes don't work
 - Food: it will be eaten but won't count for anything
 - Stuff: it will be looked at and then thrown away

Common Misconceptions

- Application review is the same every year
 - It is not guaranteed that, if a family member or friend was admitted with the same profile as you and you do the exact same things, that you will be admitted
 - It is not guaranteed that, if a family member or friend was denied but you have a stronger profile, that you will be admitted

Takeaways

No matter what you've heard or hear, there is not trick or sure thing to guarantee admission at a selective college.

The best you can do is to get your admissions counselor to want to advocate for you in committee.

How do you do that?:

- You don't have to be their favorite app of the year; they just need to think you're a good fit for their school
- You want to be remembered, but not for the wrong reasons
- Demonstrate sincere interest
- Be authentic and genuine