

Four-Year College Applications Useful Information

College admissions counselors look most favorably at students' cumulative academic achievement and willingness to take rigorous classes. Using a comprehensive review process, admissions personnel look at an essay or personal statement, leadership opportunities, contributions to the community, individual circumstances, and distinctive attributes. "While included in the mix, standardized test scores rarely are the decisive factor."

Here are some areas where students hurt themselves on college applications:

- Little or no academic course work beyond the core requirements, even though options were available.
- Too many capable students who mistakenly assume that simply meeting core requirements is sufficient or that the senior year is not important.
- Ongoing struggles in math. With quantitative reasoning being the #1 stumbling block for freshmen, all college-bound students need 3-4 years of math.
- Not fulfilling core requirements for Chemistry or Physics.
- Sporadic or negative grade trends, frequently followed by an across the board drop in curricular rigor.
- Poor presentation; not taking the time to put the best foot forward; missing deadlines; failing to follow up on requests for additional information

Distinguishing factors that had a positive impact on college applications include:

- Taking a full academic load through senior year, including math through pre-calculus or calculus
- Taking 3 or 4 years of the same foreign language.
- Taking 4 years of science - including chemistry and physics.
- While advanced classes such as AP, Honors, Running Start, and IB are outstanding options for many students, taking a full schedule of "regular" classes can be equally impressive in the application review.
- Perseverance in the face of significant hardship.
- Potential contributions to the community such as multiculturalism, exceptional talent, leadership, "heart", and passion for a subject, activity or cause.
- Well-written personal statement that helps colleges get to know what is important to a student and/or to understand academic choices and personal circumstances.
- Sustained involvement and leadership, rather than occasional or one-time participation in extracurricular activities.
- Students who list activities that occurred for one hour or one-half day generally lose credibility in the review process.
- Being involved in a "risk taking" situation, such as going on exchange, standing up for one's beliefs, or accepting new challenges stand out

Summarized from Western Washington University's Admissions Office "We Admit" Newsletter, March 2005

