

FACTORS IN SELECTIVE (and non-selective) COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

From admissions officers everywhere, the advice is virtually the same. Here is what counts to them...

Your Secondary School Record - How have you done in the courses taken? Colleges would much rather see you taking a tough and challenging load that is in line with your ability than picking up easy points in an "easy" course. Develop your interests to be sure, but don't neglect a solid foundation in English, math, the sciences, history and foreign language. Remember, the senior year is the time you need to do your very best academic work. In fact, some colleges have been known to retract offers of admission upon receipt of a final transcript which reveals unsatisfactory grades in the spring of the senior year.

ACT/SAT Scores - Scores on the SAT or the ACT are used by admissions committees as one measure to compare students from different schools. SAT II test scores are often considered more important as they come closer to testing actual knowledge learned in a particular course. Standardized test results ultimately reflect the student's ability to take timed, multiple choice tests and is not intended to represent the individual student's cognitive abilities. Many able students have low test scores. A combination of high grades and low test scores can be explained by many factors. HOWEVER, high scores and low grades are the worst possible combination, since it almost always describes an able person who does not work productively and is therefore perceived by admissions officers as a greater risk.

The Essay and the Application - The essay is often the most overlooked aspect of college admissions by students. Seniors are expected to spend a considerable amount of time in the preparation of the essay. It is your chance to become more than a name for the admissions staff. Your choice of topic for the essay is far less important than its presentation. It should be personal and honest, thoughtfully and carefully written, and discuss something of importance to you. Unless it says otherwise, TYPE the essay (and that means YOU, not a parent or secretary). Neatness counts. You are presenting yourself through this document, and a hastily completed, sloppy, hard-to-read application form will not win you points; an imperfect but genuine effort will.

The Counselor Statement - The school's recommendation for a student is written by the college counselor after collaboration with your counselor. We attempt to present an assessment which is fair and accurate and which emphasizes achievements and talents. We don't ignore major difficulties as they are reflected on the transcript, but we do tell the story to your advantage in so far as possible. We will learn much about you from the available sources: teacher comments, your parents' comments, your resume, and from our various individual conferences. Please give at least two weeks notice to the guidance office when requesting a recommendation.

Teacher Recommendations - Each college has its own specific requirements for teacher recommendations, but in most cases two are requested: one from a history, English or foreign language teacher, and the other from a math or science teacher. In some instances colleges are very specific, asking for recommendations from your current English and math teachers, whereas

in other instances they may give you your choice or require none at all. If you have a particular strength in the arts or athletics or any extracurricular activity, you may want to have your teacher or coach write on your behalf, but in all other instances you should not give the colleges more than they ask for. Read the application forms carefully to see what is required.

Teacher recommendations speak to your abilities and accomplishments as a student and need to be positive. Thus, you should choose carefully the teachers you ask and be sure they feel comfortable writing a recommendation for you. Don't assume that your chosen teacher will automatically accept your request. Have back-ups in mind. Be sure they are teachers you've worked with in your junior or senior year, and finally remember to phrase your request as a request, not a demand. **Provide pre-addressed, stamped envelopes and your resume to the teacher.** (* Be sure to write your teachers a thank you note.)

Extracurricular Activities and Work Experience - Your involvement in activities does not carry as much weight as your transcript unless your talent or skill is exceptional. If you are an accomplished musician, you may impress a committee in your audition, especially if you are the bassoonist he/she needs for next year's orchestra. If you are one of the nation's best high school point guards, your 2.8 grade point average may be overlooked. For the majority of students the list of high school activities indicates a high level of involvement; only rarely is it exceptional. Capable involvement is seen as a good thing by college people if it means something to you other than simply compiling a list of activities, and if the time commitment does not detract from your academic record.

Geographic Distribution and Legacy Status - In addition to ethnic and racial diversity, each college has an interest in creating a geographically diverse student body. Hence, if you are applying to colleges far away from home, you may have a slight advantage over equally qualified local candidates. It is also in a college's own self-interest to encourage generations of family to attend the college, since these families are possibly among their most loyal (and generous) supporters. For that reason, if you're applying to the undergraduate college one of your parents attended, you may have a distinct advantage over equally qualified candidates, but it hardly makes your admission "a sure thing." The amount that either of these factors affects admission cannot be quantified or predicted.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Many college applications now ask whether the applicant has ever been suspended or otherwise disciplined by the school, recognizing that such students are often at risk in a college environment. Disciplinary files at Trinity Christian Academy are not a part of the student's academic record. Therefore, the school will not give information to colleges about individual disciplinary actions, however, if asked, students are encouraged to be truthful about significant disciplinary matters.