**Top 10 Things Colleges Look for in a High-School Student**

What are college admissions officers looking for as they review your application? The admissions process varies and can be subjective to some degree, but here are 10 things that could help you stand out!

**A Challenging High School Curriculum**

A transcript that reflects that you take on challenges can put you a step ahead. Academically successful students should include several honors and Advanced Placement classes.

**Strong Grades and an Upward Trend**

Admissions officers value grades that represent strong effort. Grades should show an upward trend over the years. However, slightly lower grades in a rigorous program are preferred to all A's in less challenging coursework.

**Solid Scores on Standardized Tests**

Scores on the SATs and ACTs carry considerable weight in the college admissions process. Scores should ideally be consistent with high school performance.

**Quality Involvement in Activities**

Passionate involvement in a few activities — and a demonstration of leadership and initiative in those activities — can only help a student. Depth, not breadth, of experience is most important.

**A Record of Community Service**

Community service activities serve as evidence of a student being a "contributor." Volunteer activities should demonstrate concern for other people and a global view.

**Work or Out-of-School Experiences**

Jobs, summer programs, and other out-of-school activities can demonstrate your sense of responsibility, dedication, and personal development in areas of interest. Meaningful use of free time can show maturity.

**A Well-Written Essay**

A strong college essay provides insight into your unique personality, values, and goals. The application essay should be thoughtful and highly personal. It should demonstrate careful and well-constructed writing.

**Positive Recommendations from School Personnel**

Hopefully your letters of recommendation from teachers and guidance counselors give evidence of integrity, special skills, and positive character traits. You should request recommendations from teachers who respect your work in an academic discipline.

**Additional Recommendations from Adults Who Know You Well**

Supplementary recommendations by adults who have had significant direct contact with you can also bolster a college application. For example, letters from coaches or supervisors in long-term work or volunteer activities are valuable. However, recommendations from casual acquaintances or family friends, even if they're well known, are rarely given much weight.

**Other Special Attributes or Awards**

Don't overlook anything special that makes you stand out from the rest of the applicants! Include honors, awards, evidence of unusual talent or experience, or anything else that makes the student unique. Overall, colleges are seeking students who will be active contributing members of the student body.