

# College Admission Expectations regarding Student Involvement

Colleges are interested in a student's extracurricular activities -- in other words, how you spend your time outside of classes. Colleges care about the character of people they admit; therefore, what you do after school, during weekends and over summers tells them a lot about the kind of person you are. When you think about it, you *are* what you do every day, every month, every year.

## Quality of Activities Is More Important Than Quantity

When it comes to extracurricular involvements, it doesn't really matter what the content is. Anything from doing a major DNA research project to volunteering at a school that serves low income students to excelling at fly-fishing is legitimate fodder for college application grids. No matter the activity, colleges look for quality of involvement rather than quantity of activities. In other words, it is better to be consistently involved in one, two, or three activities and/or sports over a number of years, than superficially involved in eight, 10 or 12 for shorter periods of time. Simply put, activity laundry lists do not impress. Maximize the time you spend in extracurricular activities by trying things that interest you and then choosing special ones you want to focus on. Plan around how your activities, academic interests, talents and skills come together and make sense in terms of who you are.

Extracurricular activities are the major way students can demonstrate how unique they are, possibly more interesting, even "better" than other student applicants, and showcase what they love to do.

As college admissions people read applications, the following is what they are likely to look for in student extracurricular activities:

### **A. Whether time spent on an involvement has been growth-producing, productive or meaningful. Have you...**

- Made a difference? (e.g., doubled the number of students involved in a community service activity, made a difference in others' lives)
- Completed or contributed to a worthwhile end product or cause? (e.g., created a new website for your school or activity, organized a speaking series at your school around issues of women and leadership)?
- Learned something, or developed a skill or talent? (e.g., became an expert about fireflies, gained fluency in Chinese, or learned to be a first-rate improviser)?
- Reached a goal? (e.g., became an Eagle Scout, made the Varsity team of a sport)

### **B. How leadership or initiative has been demonstrated. Have you...**

- Been founder, president or the "first" of something important? (e.g., founder of a new book club, president of the debate team, the first high school student to be a paid staff photographer for a local newspaper)
- Served as captain of an athletic team, been a member of a championship team, or individual champion? (e.g., for any common sport: football, softball, basketball; or uncommon sport: archery, orienteering, darts, scuba diving)
- Progressed from regular member status to a leadership position through the course of years? (e.g., started out as a young camper and after many years moved to head counselor)?

- Changed the nature of an organization or made it better/more effective? (e.g., organized a successful inter-school art exchange)?
- Gone beyond the norm in terms of contribution to the group, team or project? (e.g., written a play for your school to perform that gets national attention; performed well enough at a sport to be invited to pre-Olympic competition)

**C. What kind of outside recognition has been received. Have you...**

- Received any awards, honors, newspaper accounts, rankings; publication of your work; letters of acknowledgment, thanks or appreciation?

**D. Specific qualities colleges look for:**

- Competence, effectiveness, high energy level, adventurous nature, responsibility, curiosity, perseverance, cooperation, sustained commitment, maturity, character, passion, and focus.
- Showing an interest in the lives and welfare of others; helping your family or community; or appreciating opportunities you've had.

Think about your activities. Do they demonstrate any of the above?

**Summers during your high school years:** Colleges are very interested in what students do during summer vacations. Any indication that you have done nothing more than play video games, watch television, get a good suntan or just hang out with friends is not going to please admissions officers.

On the other hand, don't go overboard with extracurricular activities. You also need to relax so that you can do your best during the coming school year. Be smart about how you use this time.