

# What Colleges Look for in Applicants

① A **rigorous high school curriculum** that challenges the student and may include AP or IB classes.



② **Grades** that represent a strong effort and an **upward trend**. However, slightly lower grades in a rigorous program are preferred to all A's in less challenging coursework.

*#1 and 2 go hand-in-hand and top the list because they are by far the best predictors of how you'll perform in college. It's a mix of the classes you take + the grades you earn. So go ahead & challenge yourself!*

③ **Solid scores on standardized tests** (ACT or SAT). These should be consistent with high school performance.

*Standardized tests are an easy way to compare students from different backgrounds.*

④ A **well-written essay** that provides insight into the student's unique personality, values and goals.

*Great essays reveal the real YOU! Instead of looking at the essay as a "requirement", think of it as an "opportunity" to express yourself, to think deeply and to give the admissions office some insight into your unique personality. But don't expect to submit an essay you wrote for a class. Application essays have very specific criteria.*

⑤ **Passionate involvement** in a few in- or out-of-school activities. **Commitment and depth** are valued over minimal involvement in a large number of activities.



⑥ Demonstrated **leadership and initiative** in extra-curricular activities. Students who arrive on campus prepared to lead clubs and activities are highly desirable.

*Try new things. Join stuff. Invent yourself. Show 'em what you do after regular school hours, and don't wait to be elected or anointed. Show up. Word hard. Get stuff done. That's leadership.*

## Colleges also value:

- Personal characteristics that will contribute to a **diverse and interesting student body**. Many colleges seek to develop a freshman class that is diverse: geographically, culturally, ethnically, economically, and politically.
- Demonstrated **intellectual curiosity** through reading, school, leisure pursuits, and more.
- Demonstrated **enthusiasm to attend**, often exhibited by campus visits and an interview, showing an interest toward attending the college if offered admission.
- **Letters of recommendation** from teachers and guidance counselors that give evidence of integrity, special skills, positive character traits, and an interest in learning.
- **Special talents** that will contribute to the college's student life program. Colleges like to know what you intend to bring to campus, as well as what you'll take from your college experience.
- Out of school experiences including **work, community service, youth organizations, religious groups**, etc. Again, passionate involvement is meaningful to the admissions office; casual memberships are not.