

APPLICATION REVIEW

How colleges review applications for admission will vary from college to college. Some larger public universities make admission decisions using a computer formula that measures the extent to which students have met minimum grade, testing, and course credit requirements. At the majority of private colleges and the more highly selective publics, admission officers base their decisions on careful and often multiple readings of applications, looking at numerous factors. Thus, as you complete your applications, **bear in mind that readers and evaluators will be attentive to and interested in what you are presenting in your application.**

Ranges of selectivity and admission patterns at individual colleges can vary somewhat from year to year as applicant pools increase and decrease in size and as colleges modify enrollment targets or admission criteria. Thus, predicting admission or denial of an application is not a precise science. Most colleges publish freshman class profiles which provide useful statistics about their applicant and admitted student pools. These profiles often make it possible to compare your test scores and GPA with typical statistical ranges to get a general sense of where your credentials might fall in a college's applicant pool. If you fall very far below the middle profile range, the college may not be a likely admission option. You will find that colleges typically do not report **average** SAT scores but rather the score range of the **middle 50 percent** of their entering classes.

Grades and Program of Study. Colleges look first and foremost at the student's academic record, taking into account the actual grade trends and program of study. EHS's graduation requirements meet most standards for admission, but you must check each specific college's requirements to make sure. Minimum requirements and what it takes to be competitive varies from college to college. Because admissible applicants to highly selective colleges typically outnumber the available openings, "admissible" is often not synonymous with "competitive." Such institutions are admitting the **most highly qualified applicants** in the pool and having to waitlist or deny many **very admissible, but less competitive students.**

It is important to **keep in mind that for highly selective colleges minimum requirements are just that—minimums, and most successful candidates exceed those minimums in some, if not several, academic areas.** While many selective institutions require three science credits, most admitted students present four. Colleges value advanced, honors and AP courses, and all colleges will find four or more years of a foreign language (or four or five years of math) more impressive than three.

While at EHS, you should take the strongest program that your academic background suggests you can handle successfully. Certainly, if you can earn strong grades in an honors section in any subject, you should be in that section. Colleges are looking for students who are willing and able to accept a challenge. The admission committee is also going to note improvement in specific academic areas and over the course of your four years of high school. Not everyone does well in all subjects all through high school, but the student who shows adequate improvement and mastery of challenging subjects may well appear to be a solid candidate for admission.

While taking into account a student's GPA, college admission officers are more attentive to grade trends. While lower grades in the freshman and sophomore years might weaken an overall grade average, an upward trend in grades in the junior and senior years will make a strong and positive statement. Colleges are looking closely at all of your work from freshman year on, although grades in the more advanced courses in the junior and senior years will be the most important. **Colleges do not overlook senior slumps,** which can greatly and negatively affect an admission decision. Admission committees will require submission of mid-year senior grades, but they will also frequently request third quarter senior

grades before they finalize the admission decision. Steady, upward, or downward trends ultimately may define the final admission decision.

Testing. Standardized tests carry more weight in the selection process at some colleges than at others, but colleges do not typically base an admission decision on scores alone. Admission tests provide a college with a nationally standardized measure of academic aptitude and background that helps frame a comparison of applicants who are coming from diverse secondary school settings. Test scores are looked at in relation to the academic record and the program of study. This combination of academic data helps colleges both predict the success of an applicant in the collegiate setting and compare the applicant objectively with other applicants.

In many admission situations, **higher grades accompanied by lower scores** is a more compelling combination than **lower grades and higher scores** because of what the academic record tells a college about academic accomplishment and motivation. In the most highly selective admission situations, the applicant pool is often so large and strong that the great majority of admitted students will present strength across the board.

Most colleges will use the best verbal and math scores drawn from multiple SAT testings. They also use the best SAT II Subject Test or ACT scores if a student repeats a test. If an institution has different testing policies, they will be stated in the admission materials.

Rounding factors and special admission categories. Admission committees do look beyond the primary academic data when reading an application. Recommendations from the college counselor and teachers help define a student's academic accomplishments and potential. The essay serves as a writing sample and often provides more information about who the student is, as do the descriptions of extracurricular activities, honors, and awards. Supplementary information provided by the student or in additional recommendations may add to the overall picture, and at some colleges, interviews are used in an evaluative way in the process.

Often, students will fit in special applicant categories that can give them a preference or an edge in the admission process:

- ◆ **Instate/out-of-state admission status:** If you are applying to a public institution, state residency will give you an admission preference over out-of-state applicants. Many state institutions publish both their in-state and out-of-state requirements. While policies vary from college to college, some public universities consider the children of alumni within the parameters of in-state admission standards. Out-of-state student enrollment quotas and admission standards vary greatly from institution to institution.
- ◆ **Legacy status:** At many colleges, sons and daughters of alumni are given a preferred status in the selection process. Because colleges define who is a "legacy" in different ways, you will find that preferred status sometimes does or does not extend to siblings, grandchildren, cousins, etc. of alumni. Ask colleges how they define legacy status. While legacies are accorded preference in different ways by colleges, an admission committee still typically must be able to predict a legacy's success in its academic program in order to offer admission. Sometimes being related to a major donor or supporter of a college will give you an edge in the selection process—but not always. It never hurts your case to make sure that a college knows that you have a connection to the institution. Whether or not it ultimately affects the admission decision, you will usually find that colleges are interested in knowing about such connections.

- ◆ **Minority students:** Recognizing the advantages of multicultural diversity in the collegiate setting, colleges are seeking an ethnically and racially diverse population, and under-represented minorities are actively recruited. Students of your ethnic or racial background may be under-represented on some campuses and not on others. While a college will be looking for evidence of achievement and a prediction of success, minority student status may be an advantage in the admission process.

- ◆ **The special talent:** A student with exceptional ability in an area and who meets basic academic standards may receive special admission consideration. The winner of a piano competition, an all-state running back, a published writer, a commercial-quality photographer, or the nationally ranked squash player may all be desirable. You will find that colleges in all of the NCAA's various divisions have an interest in recruiting talented athletes. Admission officers are seeking to admit a **diversely talented** student body. If you have a special talent, write about it in your application. It may give you an edge.