



College Admissions Process and Criteria Survey

Looking at and beyond the college application checklist

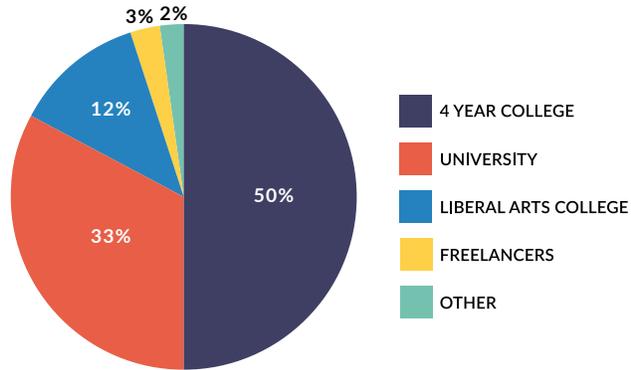
May 2017

INTRODUCTION

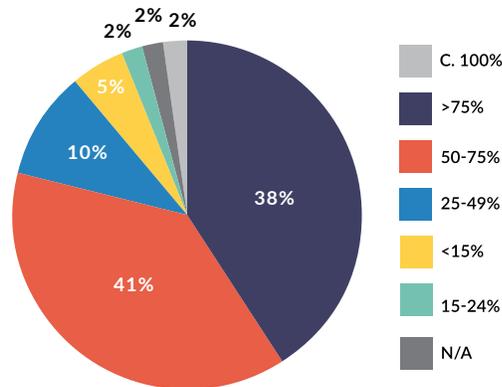
The survey was conducted in May 2017. Its objective was to develop a better understanding of the criteria that college admissions officers apply when evaluating candidates and look beyond a simple checklist of required application materials. The study consisted of qualitative, one-on-one interviews followed by a quantitative survey among college admissions officers of US colleges and universities.

Over 80% of respondents work at 4-year colleges and universities that admit over 50% of applicants; have more than 10 years of college admissions experience; and come from 24 states.

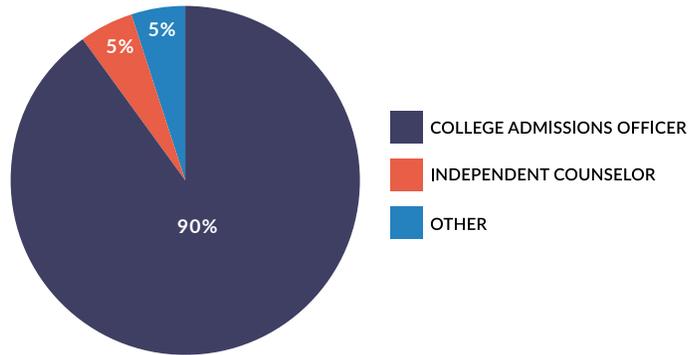
School Type
(% of respondents)



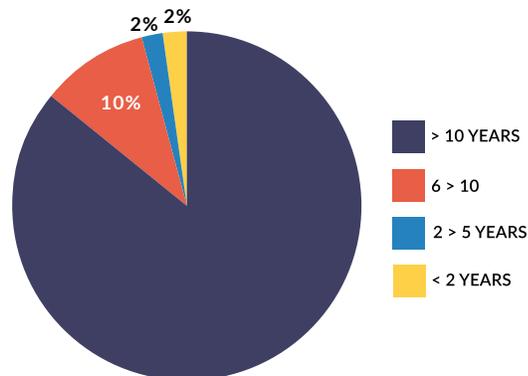
% of Candidates Admitted
(% of respondents)



% Occupation
(% of respondents)



Years of College Admissions Experience
(% of respondents)



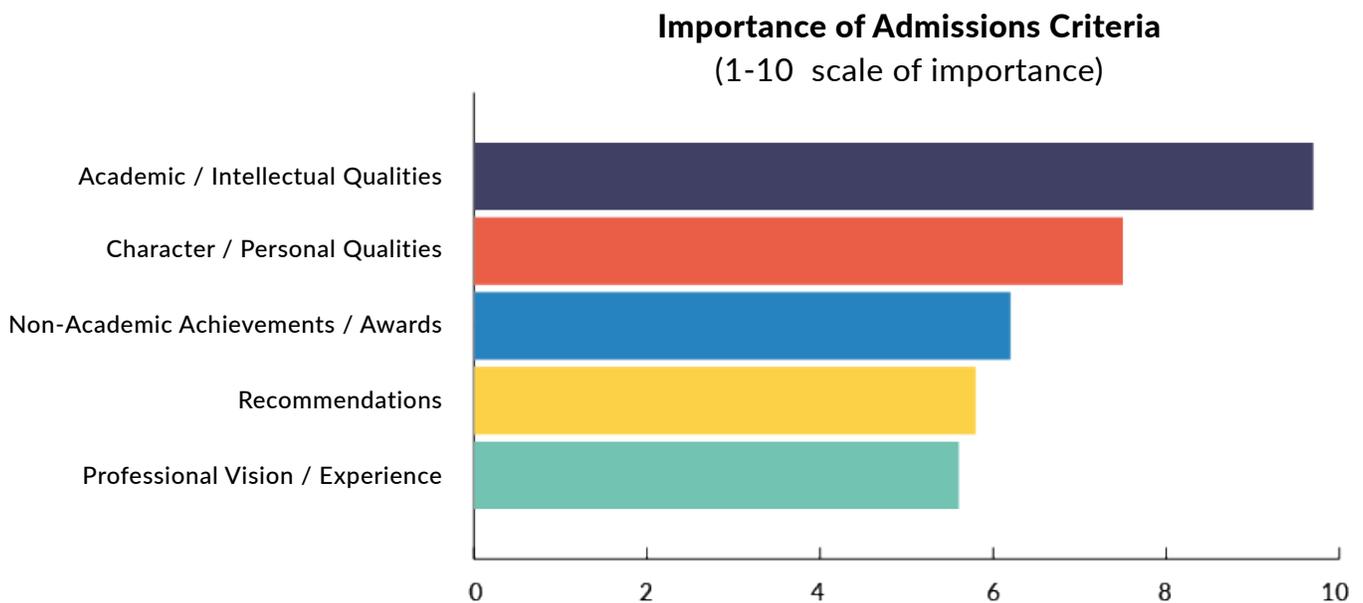
ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

We created a hypothesis that all the information that college admissions process covers could be clustered into:

1. Academic / intellectual qualities
2. Personal qualities / character
3. Endorsements (recommendations, awards, achievements, etc.)
4. Professional plans.

All survey respondents agreed with that structure proposal and 18% would add a category. They considered academic performance to be by far the most important criteria but the other ones were also relevant to the candidate assessment process. This confirmed our post qualitative study hypothesis that college admissions officers have overwhelmingly adopted a comprehensive approach to candidate assessment.

Academic results are the most important but character and candidate credibility weigh considerably.



STARTING WITH A CHECKLIST

On average between 5 and 6 application materials are required for review in the admissions process. The only two that are almost uniformly required are school transcripts and GPA. Standardized test scores come very close with almost 80% of respondents indicating that they require them to be provided.

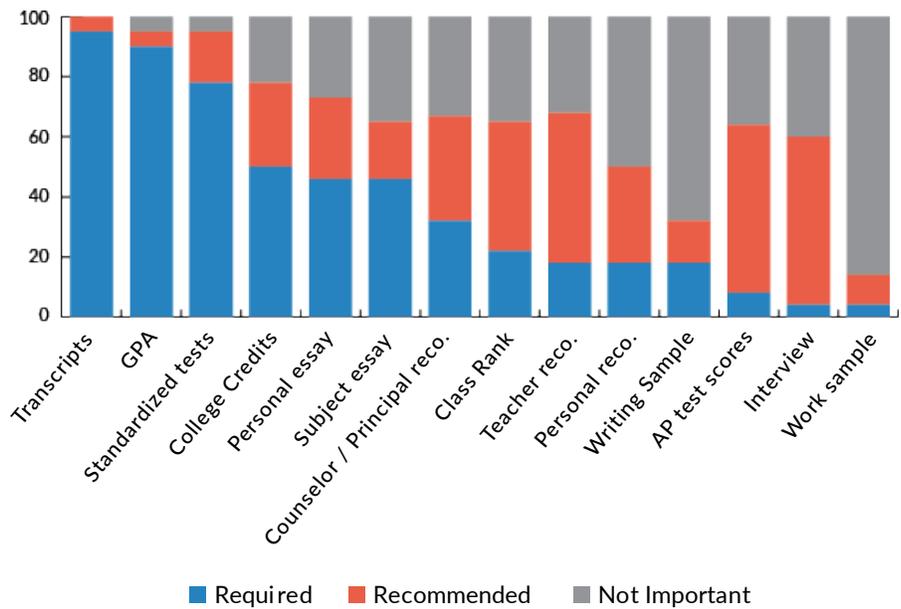
No other requirement is shared by more than half of the respondents. However, the second tier of the requirements includes college credits, personal essay or resume and an essay written on a given subject.

A good application portfolio should go beyond a checklist of requirements

On top of what is required, college admissions officers recommend on average 4 more items that should be provided, though these are not necessary. The most commonly recommended, but not required, application materials were AP test scores (57%), personal interview (57%), teacher recommendations (50%) and class rank (43%).

In particular, very few colleges require personal interviews and AP test scores. However, many college admission officers consider them valuable to the admissions process.

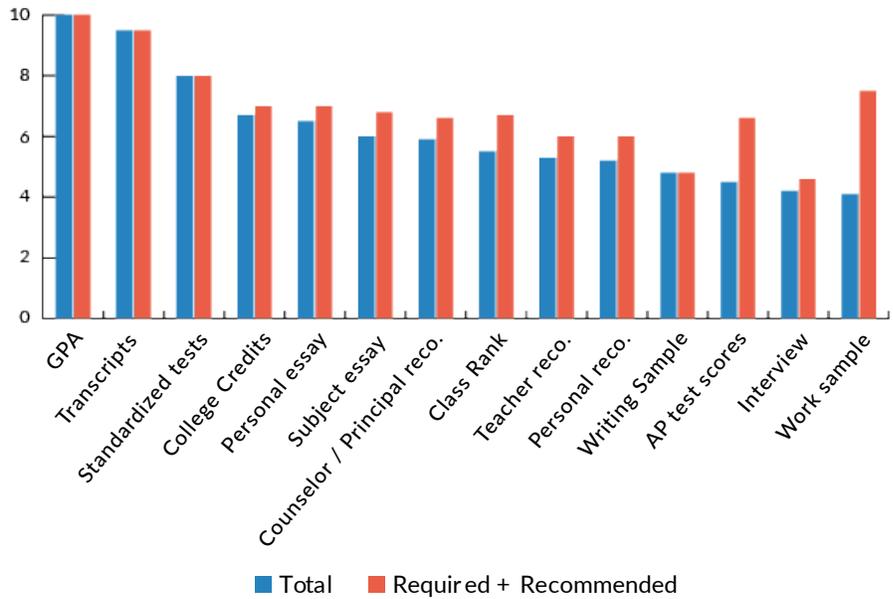
Application Material Requirements
(% of respondents)



Writing, work samples are essential for the colleges that ask for them.

College applications requirements are generally perceived as valuable and relevant. Besides, writing / work samples, showcasing portfolio artifacts, and to a smaller extent personal recommendations have high 'niche' importance. They are ranked as having high importance by relatively few respondents who require or recommend them in the admissions process.

Importance of Application Materials (1-20 scale importance)

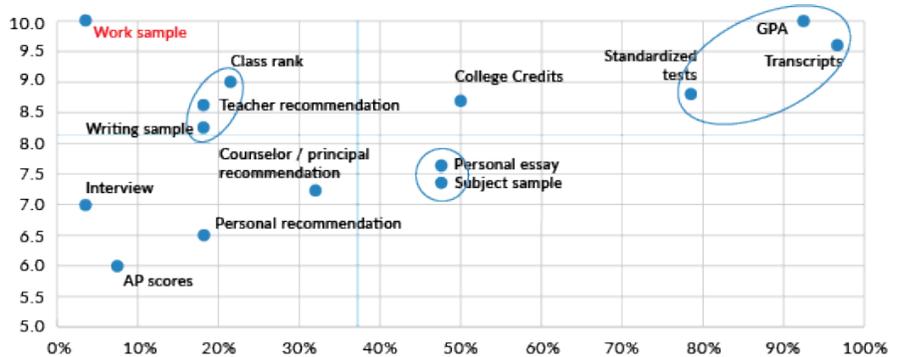


Transcripts, GPA and standardized tests are fundamental.

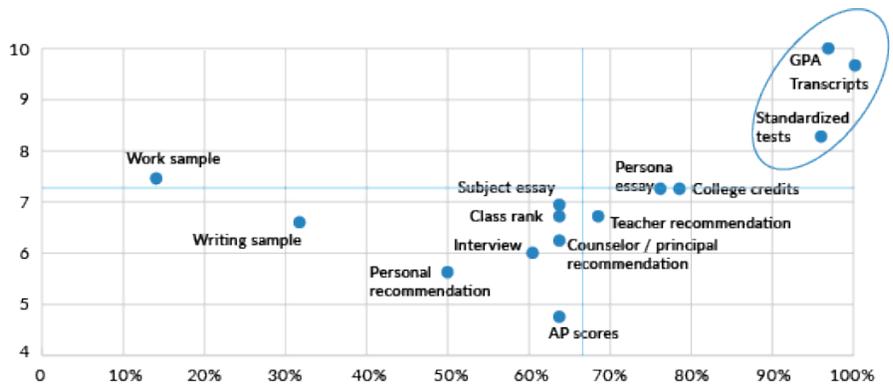
Perception of the importance of college application requirements reveals that:

- Transcripts, GPA and standardized test scores are both required by most and weight a lot.
- Work samples are seldom required but weigh heavily when required. For example, this is the case for arts-related programs.
- Class rank, teacher recommendation and writing sample show similar but much less pronounced ‘niche’ importance tendency.
- On the other hand, personal essays and subject-focused essays are commonly required but not ranked in high importance.

Required vs Importance (among required only)



Required & Recommended vs Importance
(among required & recommended only)



TIME PERSPECTIVE

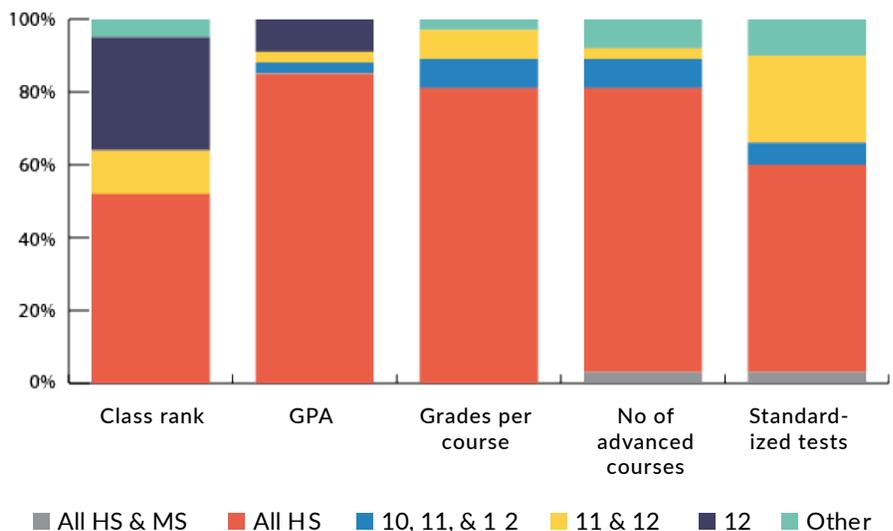
The 9th grade is the best moment to start working on one's college candidate profile

College admissions officers are predominantly interested in the whole high school history of candidate's academic performance. Qualitative interviews demonstrate that performance trends can be equally informative as the results themselves.

Class rank, which many colleges do not look at, is fairly often considered for the 12th grade only.

Standardized test results, consistent with the purpose of measuring college readiness, are often considered for the 11th & 12th grade only.

Required History of Application Data
(% of respondents)



COLLEGE CANDIDATE – MORE THAN THE GRADES

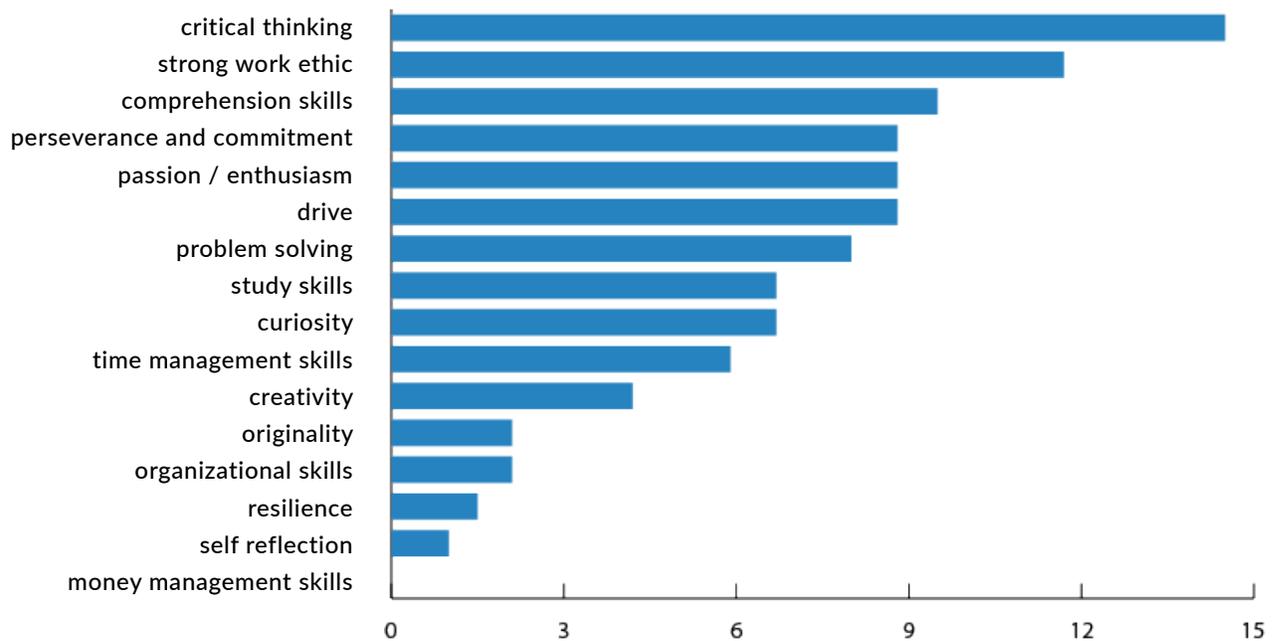
Character can be a good predictive metric of college success

In the qualitative part of the research, we learned that college admission officers are looking for students who not only have a strong academic performance but also have demonstrated desirable personal qualities. That personal insight allows colleges to assess cultural fit and the probability of student's success in a particular environment.

The top three intrapersonal qualities that the admissions officers chose are all related to candidates' ability to meet the intellectual requirements and rigor of college. The following three however, describe an individual's attitude when dealing with challenges and opportunities.

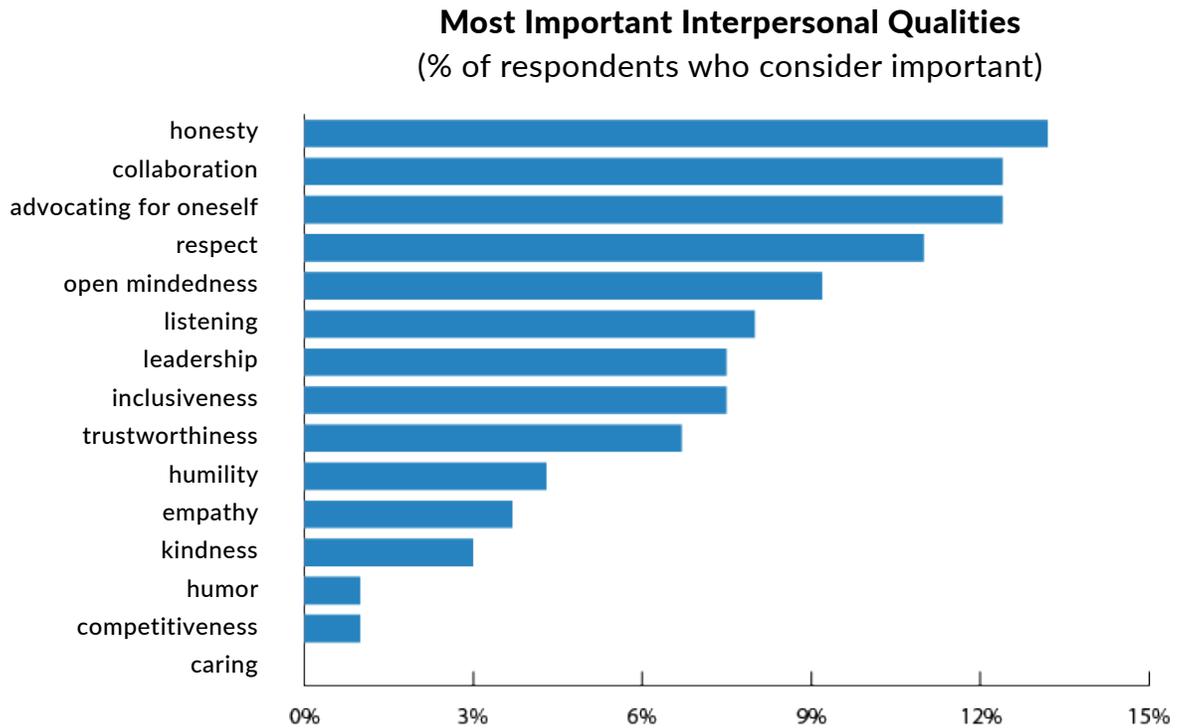
While critical thinking is the one characteristic that the college admissions officers uniformly consider very important, it is intriguing that creativity and originality were placed towards the bottom of the importance ranking.

Most Important Intrapersonal Qualities
(% of respondents who consider important)



Collaboration still beats competition in college

The top interpersonal qualities paint a picture of an honest student who can work well with others but at the same time can advocate for himself. While collaboration was one of the top qualities, competitiveness was ranked very low.



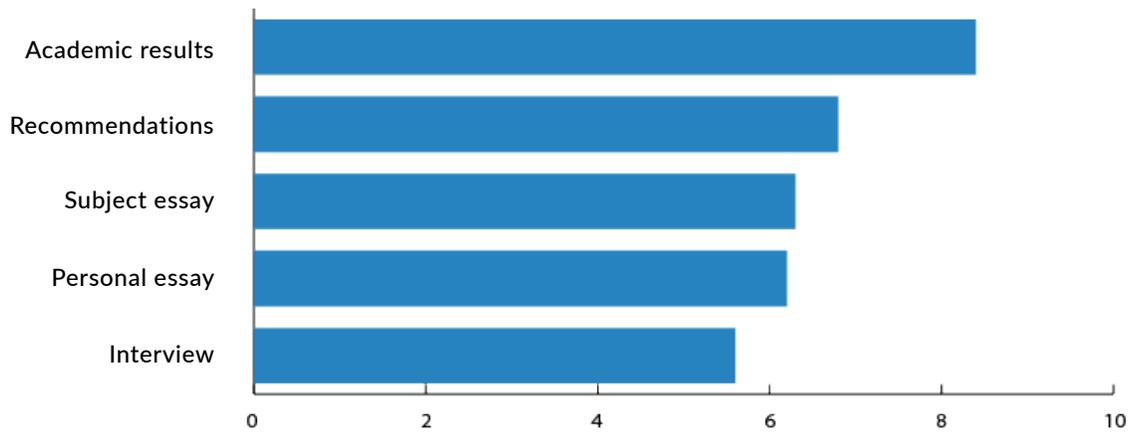
There are many ways to tell a compelling story of personal character

There is no single personal quality that all respondents agreed is the most important one. It is encouraging that there is no 'cookie cutter' approach to candidate selection and it is an indication that an appealing college candidate profile can be built upon various qualities.

But academic performance has to be consistent with a candidate's story

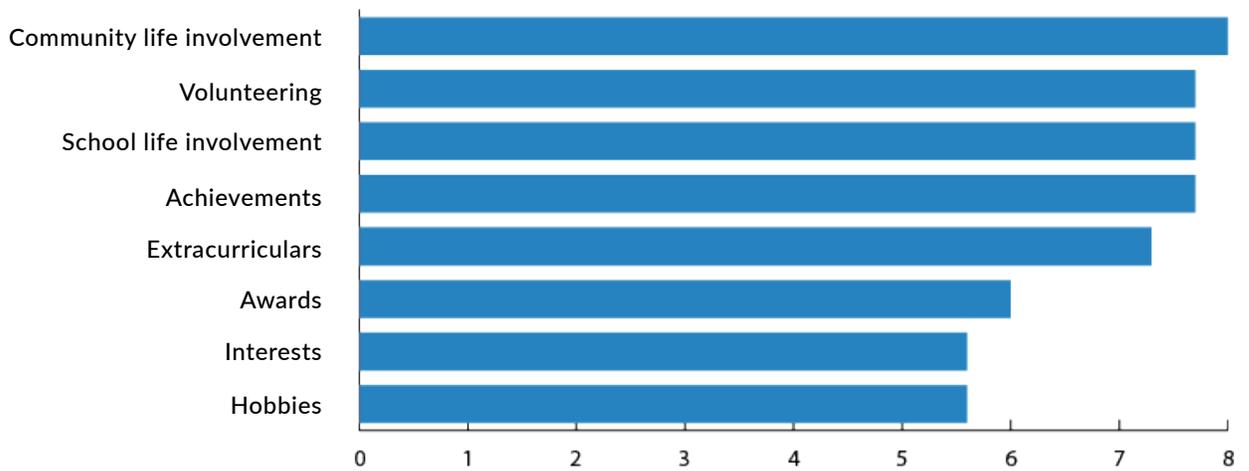
Academic results remain the most important source of candidate information to develop insight into their personal qualities. It is consistent with the top choices of intrapersonal qualities, like work ethic, but more difficult to explain in case of interpersonal ones. Recommendations, essays, and an interview, while ranked lower, are still useful to college admissions officers.

Assessing Personal Qualities (1-10 scale)



There are many ways for candidates to provide evidence of their personal qualities and college admission officers are open to consider and learn from all of them.

Evidence of Personal Qualities (1-10 scale of importance)

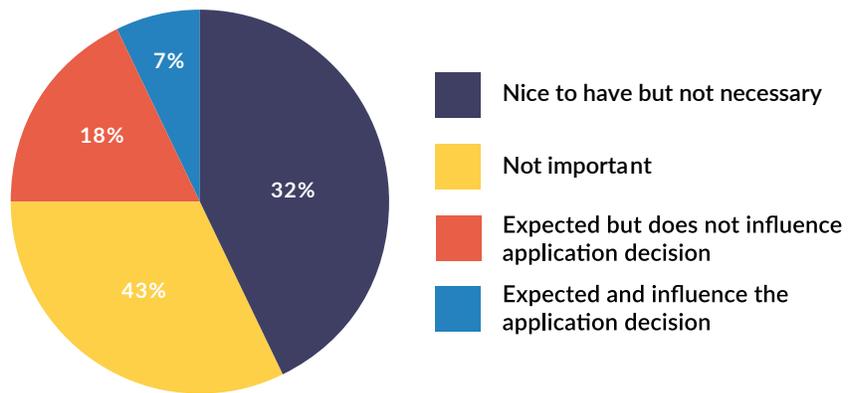


COLLEGE – THE BEGINNING OF A PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY

There is still time for students to choose their profession

We asked college admissions officers if they expect candidates to have a clear vision of their professional future. The overwhelming answer was no, or ‘it is a nice to have’. Colleges accept that their freshmen are still exploring options and taking their time to decide which professional path to take. We believe that this makes the US higher education system somewhat different from other parts of the world, where college candidates are expected to have chosen a professional career they want to pursue.

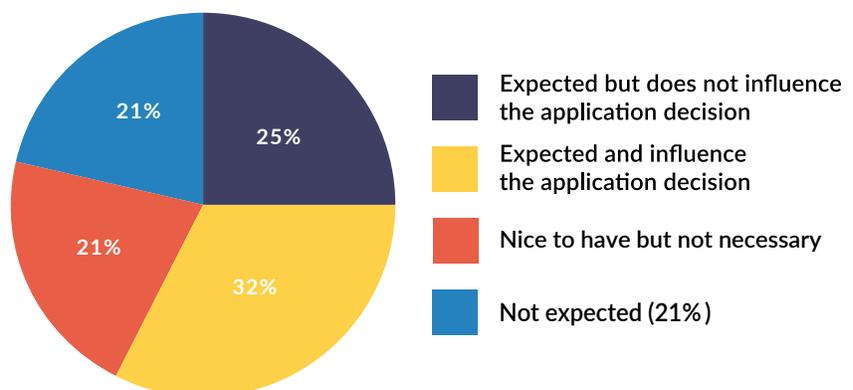
Expectations of Professional Plans
(% of respondents)



It helps a candidate to be clear why they are applying to a particular college

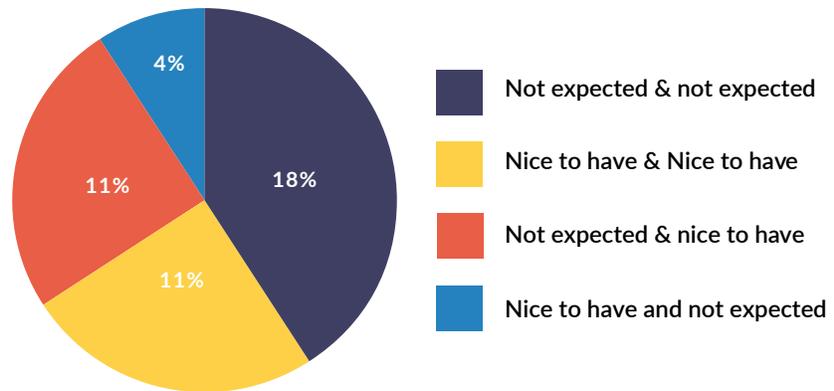
Admissions officers' expectations change when it comes to candidates' explaining why they have decided to apply to a particular college. Almost 60% of them consider that a student should be able to explain their choice. And close to 60% of those, declare that candidates' answers influence admission decisions.

Reasons for College Selection
(% of respondents)



About 40% of respondents did not expect that candidates should explain to them either their professional plans or their college choice. In fact, as much as 18% of college admissions officers indicated that none of the two is expected.

'Not expected' and 'Nice to have' expectations
(% of respondents)



OUR FIVE KEY TAKE AWAYS

1. Transcripts, GPA and standardized test scores are fundamental. College admissions officers look beyond the grades and scores however, and want to learn a candidate's story that these results tell.
2. Outstanding character and personal qualities can significantly improve candidate's chances.
3. Colleges look for multiple ways for students to stand out. However, they must prove that they are academically and personally prepared for the challenges of college.
4. An application to college in most cases is not yet a beginning of a professional journey. But a thoughtful selection of colleges that a candidate applies to is a valued sign of maturity.
5. A college candidate's personal story is built over time. A convincing story plot starts in the 9th grade. If there is 'a chapter that does not fit', a candidate should help admissions officers understand what happened.

Contact us. We will be delighted to talk.

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