COMPETITION IN THE COLLEGE ADMISSION PROCESS: MYTH VS. FACT

For most high school students, applying to college is a high-stress experience. There’s so much about this process that feels like a guessing game, and all the guessing can leave you feeling constantly worried and unsure about the choices you make. In this article we will identify a few important facts and set you straight about a few common myths in the hope of making this process as stress-free as possible.

Next Steps

- Start Applying Now: See Our Complete List of Applications
- Learn About Distance Learning Opportunities
- Find Out How You Can Let Your Dream School Contact You
- Use Counselor-O-Matic to Find Your Good Match Schools

The Facts

There are more high school-age students applying to college today, than in years past. This means that there are more high-achieving high school students applying to the same number of highly selective schools. In a nutshell, it's tougher to be admitted to highly selective schools today than in previous decades. Students today need stronger transcripts and stronger scores.

As a result of the first fact, college admissions has become more numbers based. Gone are the days when a winning interview or knock-out resume got you admitted to your first choice school. Today, the primary factor in college admissions is the high school transcript.

Colleges want to see that students have tried to challenge themselves by taking the toughest courses their high school has to offer. This means that you're better off pulling a B in an advanced or honors course, than pulling an A in a regular course. Colleges need to determine how well you can perform in college-level or advanced classes. If you don't take any, admissions officers won't have enough information to go on.

Your SAT's are obviously important, but not as important as the high school transcript. Not even perfect SAT scores will get you admitted to a highly selective college if your transcript is weak. Your classes are your number one priority. If you can remember this, you're way ahead of the game.

Math and science are important in this process. If you've got your eye on one of the top schools in the country, plan on taking four years of math and four years of science. Even if you plan on becoming a playwright, an art historian, or a fiction writer, keep taking math and science. This will strengthen your application and give you an edge up in the competition.

There's an ever-growing number of senior class presidents applying to college, along with editor's-in-chief, and club founders. Do yourselves a BIG favor and keep the focus on your classes. Colleges want to see students who get involved, and they like students who can commit to their involvements over the course of a several years, but most importantly, they like to see students who do well in their classes. Don't get over-involved if it means you don't have enough time to study. Two or three activities that you've been consistently involved in, is just fine. Being class president won't get you admitted to your first choice school if your transcript is weak.

Common Myths

Using the Common Application will hurt my chances of admission. This is completely FALSE. Any school that accepts the common application, does so happily. There's a reason why almost all the highly selective schools accept the Common Application--because it makes no difference to them, and if it's easier for you, great. The more applications they get, the better. If it's easier for you to use the Common Application, do so without any concern.

A fabulous interview can increase my chances of admission. While there are a few instances where
If my SAT scores are super strong, I'll be admitted to highly selective colleges. While you clearly need to prepare for your standardized exams, it's important to remember that they are NOT college entrance exams. They are simply one piece of the admissions puzzle. The most selective colleges will want to see strong scores, but more importantly, they will want to see that you've taken rigorous courses and done well in them.

Applying for financial aid can hurt my chances of admissions. If you are applying to a college that is Need-Blind, that means they will have no record of your financial application. The admissions evaluation process and financial aid process will be completely separate. If you are applying to a college that is need-aware, then you may be vulnerable. Most highly selective colleges are need-blind.

If you are applying to a highly selective college or university, the best you can do to strengthen your application is to take the tougher classes and do well in those classes. This is what these schools are looking for. If you are too busy to study while running the school newspaper, campaigning for class president or starting up a new club, you need to cut back on your activities if getting into a top school is your goal. Keep the focus on your classes and your standardized testing. With this simple advice you will improve your chances of admissions to the most selective schools without the unnecessary stress of taking on more than you need to. Good luck!