

# Competitive Private Universities

What are colleges looking for in  
this new landscape

# What has changed since the pandemic?

Number of students applying to competitive universities

Data used to assess students ability to compete for a space in the university

SAT/ACT/SAT subject tests

Ability for students to strengthen their resumes

Visits to colleges

Finances

Early Decision vs Regular Decision

# Number of Applications

Although the number of high school students has decreased, this year with the omission of the SAT/ACT, competitive universities received record number of applications.

Students believed that because they had excellent grades, why not throw their name in the hat and apply.

Ex. Colgate University-very competitive liberal arts university in upstate New York received a 104% increase in applications over the previous year. Only 41% of students included test scores as the school was test optional. 60% of students were accepted Early Decision (ED)

# Data Used to Create a Class at a University

Colleges had to pivot and decide how to create a class for their university. For many this was the first time they were not utilizing the test score factor.

Most of these competitive colleges were either test optional or tests were not looked at. Students were not penalized for not turning in scores.

Next year the majority of universities have already posted that they will go test optional or will not accept tests.

# SAT/ACT/Subject Tests

This was a difficult year for the companies that make the SAT and ACT. Due to the pandemic many tests were cancelled and this led to colleges making tests optional or not accepting them.

This has been a downfall for the companies as this sped the drive to eliminate these tests in college admissions due to test biases among different socioeconomic classes.

Colleges will look at next year's freshman class and if they do well academically, than they will not go back to using this as a factor in college admissions.

**Do your research and see if the colleges you are applying to require tests or are they optional.**

# Ability for students to strengthen their resume

Due to the pandemic a lot of juniors could not pursue their interests in outside extra curricular activities.

Some students could not showcase themselves in their sports as some sports did not compete.

Students felt a lot of activities were cancelled due to the pandemic and they could not do anything.

# Visits to colleges

All colleges stopped their college tours so families were not able to research the schools they were interested in.

Colleges pivoted in showcasing their campuses by having many online college fairs, making themselves more available to answer questions through other modes of communication.

# Finances

Obviously the pandemic has affected families in many different ways but many have been hit financially hard.

Some families do not want to take a chance on sending their children far away so flying would not become another expense or they want their children close if another pandemic arises.

Colleges have had to become creative on financial aid packages and really increasing merit money for students they really want in effort to entice a student to come to their school whether it is nearby or across the country.

To be competitive for a merit scholarship, a student should be in the top 10% of applicant pool.



# What can you do now? What is the most important factor for colleges?

Even though all these things have changed in the last year, the one goal of college admissions representatives remains the same; to build a community at their university.

They are putting together a community that is going to learn from each other, that is going to challenge each other. And also, a community that is going to be made up of people who are simply good roommates, good friends, and good classmates.

# Quantitative Factors

Your grades

The rigor of your classes. The 12th grade should be a preparation for the rigor of your first year of college.

Do the classes you take reveal something about your future interests?

Do you show growth in your grades

If there was a blip in your grades, take the time to explain it and show how you overcome this and get back on track.

**Remember at these types of institutions where they are reviewing thousands of applications, test scores and GPAs mean a whole lot of nothing when they are all really stellar**

# Qualitative Factors

These are the most important factors for these schools.

The personal essay, the supplementary essays, your teacher and counselor recommendations are what really is at the meat of the application.

This is where you introduce yourself, you show them the way you share your voice, the way you frame a narrative for the admissions committee to meet you not just as an applicant but as a member of the community they are building.

Start by thinking that the application in its entirety is an autobiography of sorts. You want to take the person that you are and distill it down to its relative parts through the application. This should be intentional. You should be thinking about how do I see myself, how does each section of the application give me a chance to highlight, amplify, and expand the parts of myself that feel relevant to the way a college community will welcome me and see me as part of it.

**An admissions person used this example: If one of your friends is walking down the hallway at school and finds a college essay on the ground with no name on it, and after reading they say, "I know exactly who this essay belongs to". They know who wrote it because the writer is authentically themselves through the essay.**

# Personal Essays

Most students when they think about writing college essays, worry about having some meaning of life topic. Or they go down a prescribed path. You should simply tell your story. Find the words to help the admissions representative really get to know you. Most times at private colleges, reps will need to present your file to others and fight for your acceptance. Give them the tools to do this. To accomplish this, do not wait until the last minute to start writing your essays. You are an amazing person with a lot of gifts and you should not reduce yourself to telling them who you are by waiting to the last minute. This summer would be a great time to start the rough draft of your main essay. You can find this by creating a [www.Commonapp.org](http://www.Commonapp.org) account August 1 and then looking at the six different essay prompts. See which one you feel would best tell the colleges who you are. Share your essays or ideas with your family and ask them if the rough drafts you are writing really distill the descriptors of you.

Private school applications will have one general essay that is sent to all the colleges you apply to and typically two or three supplementary essays that are specific to that institution. Do not gloss over these smaller supplemental essays but really use this as an opportunity to enhance your description of yourself. Utilize supplementary essays as your chance to show them the connection you see between who you are and who they are. You can do this by attending online college fairs for the schools you are interested in. Spending some time looking through the website of the school and seeing how they describe themselves. What is important to them. Do you share this vision with them? If not, maybe this school is not a good fit for you. Peruse through the major you are interested in and see what they offer their students in this major. Are their interesting courses that students in this major take or programs that they must participate in or are offered to them. This will help you in finding the connection between you and the university.

**Ultimately, be authentically you!**

# Letters of Recommendations

Most private universities will require one or two letters of recommendation from teachers and one from a counselor.

We know that due to this pandemic year it has been more difficult for teachers and students to create a relationship, but these type of schools do not want this to be a reason to simply not give importance to this aspect. Take the time to think of which teacher you have connected the most with and make an appointment with them to share some of your thoughts of the future or things you have been doing even though we have had the pandemic.

Remember that a recommendation does not necessarily need to come from a teacher where you earned the best grade but maybe from someone where you have exemplified a character trait that describes you so well, the application would be incomplete without it.

When you ask this teacher next year to write a letter of recommendation, don't just simply ask them to write a recommendation, but create a cover letter that tells them exactly why you selected them.

On the commonapp you can see the evaluation from teachers asks them to rate you on many different skills such as: intellectual curiosity, respect from peers, or reaction to setbacks. Look at this and consider which teacher can best address these.

These schools will also ask for a recommendation from a counselor. As some of you already know, we have a packet of information we require students to complete when asking us for a recommendation. Take the time to include everything on this that you think would be relevant. Counselors have to write a recommendation about you in the context of the school while a teacher writes a recommendation based on who you are in the classroom.

**Ultimately, these recommendations should continue to tell your story and your autobiography.**

# Activities

We can begin this section by saying that everyone has been impacted one way or another by the pandemic. Colleges are keenly aware of this.

The essence for all these schools is what do you do with the tools you have been handed. Simply what this means is what have you done during this time of the pandemic. For example: maybe you were part of the band and could not perform so maybe you learned to play another instrument on your own, or put together some music that you sent to senior citizen centers for them to play on their birthday celebration as their families were not able to be there.

If you are thinking right now, I have not done anything and the school year is almost over. It is time to think about what you would want to attempt during the summer months. Colleges do not care if your endeavors have not been successful, but simply that you were not afraid to try things that you were so interested in or passionate about.

Don't wait around for someone to tell you a program or activity has restarted. If you really are passionate about it find a way to restart it yourself or reshape and improve it.

**Do not include on an activities sheet or an essay, I wanted to do this, but I couldn't because of the pandemic.**

# Factors out of your control

There are many factors that no one has control over so these are things to think about when it comes to college admissions.

Sometimes geographical diversity comes into play with these type of schools. As schools are building a community that will work well together they want people of different backgrounds and different experiences. Having a student from Southern California, in the Midwest, could be interesting in classroom discussions. Colleges admissions also have to admit students who the faculty will approve of and this is something else they contend with.

Sometimes colleges are trying to increase the number of students in particular majors so more students may get accepted in this area.

Colleges need to make sure the students they accept will ultimately attend their institution so **Early Decision vs Regular Decision** has become a factor this last academic year. For example back to our example of Colgate. They accepted 60% of their class through Early Decision. Tread lightly with this.

Colleges need to feel confident that a student who is leaving their home state and attending school far away will never have buyers remorse. Although you could not control going to visit campuses to show them your interest, it is a great idea to check out the school's websites and see when they are attending virtual college fairs. Email the college representative to show your interest and ask them questions about their schools. Of course, do not ask questions that can easily be found on a schools website.

# Final Thoughts

We know this process can be thought of as daunting and overwhelming, but instead you should think of this process as an opportunity for you to really learn about yourself and who you are. This process helps you recognize what is important to you, for your future, and this will assist you in getting accepted to an institution which you can call home.