

## Factors in the Admission Decision



Your high school grades are the **#1** factor in the college admission decision.

Other factors count, but the body of work you develop in high school is what matters most—as it should.

Colleges do not choose students by the numbers only—they don't simply take the students with the highest grades and test scores. Colleges use many other factors to add depth to the numbers, and to compare applicants with each other to build a class that fits the college's mission. Students who meet or exceed the threshold for admission are, at selective colleges, evaluated based on all of the attributes they bring to campus, including special talents, academic interests, and personal characteristics. Here's a breakdown of what colleges take into account:

### Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to factors in the admission decision: 2011

Factor	Considerable importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No importance
Grades in college prep courses	84.3%	11.9%	2.3%	1.5%
Strength of curriculum	67.7	20.4	5.8	6.2
Admission test scores (SAT, ACT).	59.2	29.6	6.9	4.2
Grades in all courses	51.9	39.2	6.9	1.9
Essay or writing sample	24.9	37.5	17.2	20.3
Student's demonstrated interest	20.5	29.7	24.7	25.1
Counselor recommendation	19.2	39.8	27.2	13.8
Class Rank	18.8	31.0	31.4	18.8
Teacher recommendation	16.5	41.9	26.5	15.0
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	6.9	31.2	31.5	30.4

Portfolio	6.6	12.8	30.2	50.4
Interview	6.2	25.4	25.8	42.7
SAT II scores	5.4	9.7	22.6	62.3
Extracurricular activities	5.0	43.1	38.1	13.8
State graduation exam	4.2	14.9	23.8	57.1
Work	2.3	17.0	43.2	37.5

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2011

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## Additional Factors

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**While colleges, on average, pay attention to the same types of factors, some colleges pay more attention to some factors than others.**

### College Size

- **Small colleges**—Have a more “holistic” application review process, meaning they pay more attention to all of the facets of your application.
- **Large colleges**—Have a more “mechanical” application review process, meaning numbers (GPA, test scores) play a significant role in determining your initial qualification. In the case of open-admission or near-open admission colleges, that may be the extent of the process. At more selective large colleges, the initial qualification may be followed by a more holistic review of qualified applicants.
- **Selective colleges**—Both large and small selective colleges (meaning that the colleges accept fewer than half of students who apply) have a more “holistic” application review process.

### Grades and GPAs

About two-thirds of high schools weight their GPAs for students who take college preparatory courses. To account for different grading scales among high schools, more than half of colleges *recalculate* applicants' GPAs to standardize them.

**Class Rank**

Nearly one-third of high schools do not report class rank information to colleges. Accordingly, colleges have de-emphasized class rank as a factor in the admission decision over the past decade.

**Essays**

Do colleges take extra steps to catch cheating or plagiarism on essays? Many colleges that require essays will scrutinize essays that they believe have been forged, borrowed, or heavily edited or influenced by someone other than the applicant. In fact, some colleges have instituted their own verification processes, while others have contracted with businesses that double check essays for plagiarism. Given that many colleges view the essay as an indicator of a student's interest in attending, it does not pay to have someone else write your essay.

**Other Factors that Colleges May Consider**

In order to shape their classes, colleges may consider other factors for admission, including a student's geographic location (especially for public universities), whether a student is the first in their family to go to college (for access purposes), a student's race or ethnicity (for diversity purposes), a student's relation to alumni (for the purposes of development and community-sustenance), and gender (for purposes of reflecting the population).

**Homeschooled Students**

Colleges are more likely to rely on standardized test scores (ACT, SAT) for homeschooled students than for students from high schools, due to the lack of consistency across homeschooling environments.

**Sample College Statements about Homeschooled Applicants**

Princeton University

University of New Hampshire

University of Missouri

As you start your college search process, check out NACAC's *State of College Admission* report. There, you will find a trusted source of information about the application process without the hype that often surrounds coverage of college admission.

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