

# Creating The Acceptable College Applicant

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America's colleges are far too crowded and can no longer accommodate all the *qualified* students who apply. As a result, schools reject far more applicants than they accept. As there are considerably more qualified students seeking enrollment today than at any other time in history, the objective of the admissions committee is to weed through the masses and fill their halls with the most resourceful, well-rounded, *acceptable* students they can accommodate.

In today's intensely competitive admissions process, knowing how to make a student acceptable greatly increases his/her chances of being admitted. It is essential to know what the colleges are looking for and how they determine if a student will win a prized admission ticket. While no two schools follow the exact same guidelines, it is safe to assume they go about it something like this:

The admissions committee assembles around a large conference table. Each member either has the information on a computer or receives a huge pile of folders containing transcripts, applications, essays, countless letters of recommendations, and everything else they need to make a decision in the 15 to 20 minutes allocated for any one student. They begin by eliminating unqualified students – those *deficient* in the numbers.

Next, they look for professionally looking applications with thought provoking, interesting, and grammatically flawless essays. A resume detailing academic life, extra curricular activities including community service hours, and a cleverly written special essay perhaps entitled, "Why I *Must* Attend The University of XYZ," all weigh heavily in their decision.

Acceptable college students are not born. Academic achievement is no accident and acceptable status is attained solely by the efforts of the student and their family in conjunction with their guidance counselor *and* an expert in the admissions process. To ensure they have every possible advantage, families determined to see their students succeed must set the stage early in preparation for college.

If the student's home is a circus and not conducive for study, some major changes must take place:

- Students need access to a comfortable place to study with virtually no distractions,
- A minimum of 2½ - 3 hours each night should be devoted to schoolwork,
- A daily routine including a healthy diet and eight hours of sleep must be maintained,
- Ideally, students should not be left alone without supervision for long periods of time, certainly no longer than 24 hours, and
- Students should not spend more than 15 hours each week on non-academic activities and would be ill-advised to regularly burn the midnight oil.

All students should begin high school by electing to take courses with college in mind. By the time they enter the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, they will have created the right *posture* to make admissions committees stand up and take notice.

Four years of core subjects are what all colleges are looking for, unless the student has a special ability as an athlete, vocalist, musician, or artist. English, math, a foreign language, science and history make up the core Grade Point Average (GPA), and the Honors Point Average (HPA) includes Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Electives such as art, physical education, music and computer programming are of less importance and should only be taken in conjunction with the core subjects.

Students should take as many Honors and AP classes as possible. The risk/reward ratio comes into play here as colleges are looking for students who take risks and challenge themselves academically. The bonus for earning an 'A', 'B' or even a 'C' adds extra points to the GPA and gives the student that

all-important edge. Admissions officers are even more impressed by the challenge taken than they are with the grade received.

Students must avoid becoming stressed out from taking classes beyond their reach. However, for families with an exceptionally bright child, it is highly recommended that they take as many advanced courses as they can comfortably handle. An outstanding academic record has always been and is still the greatest bargaining chip.

Students must also pursue extracurricular activities and join clubs. Membership in organizations such as the Debate Club, Student Council and Key Club aid in creating a well-rounded, acceptable student, and I strongly advise holding office or taking on a leadership role in as many of these as possible. Leadership demonstrates taking a risk and assuming responsibility. Even students who are super athletes need some diversity. They must avoid the impression that they are one-dimensional and portray themselves as multi-faceted.

Early on, beginning in *junior high*, students should start to accumulate community service hours. I define extracurricular activities as in-school participation, whereas community service takes place outside of school, i.e. scouting, religious activities, working with AIDS and/or Alzheimer's patients, seniors, hospice, involvement with the handicapped, and environmental work. Involvement with the financially, emotionally and/or intellectually challenged demonstrates compassion and empathy and makes the student shine. Working with those less fortunate also gives the student a much broader idea of life outside of their own environment.

Creating the acceptable student is no accident. It takes lots of time, work, patience, persistence, cooperation by all family members and, perhaps most of all, the student must be motivated to succeed to have any chance at all of being accepted to the college(s) of their choice. This is not the optional road for a college-bound family. It is the *only* road that leads to that all-important admissions ticket. Anything less is simply not acceptable...

For over 35 years, noted financial advisor, Reecy Aresty, has helped thousands of high school and college families to obtain the American Dream; a superior education at a cost far less than they ever dreamed possible. He is the author of the highly acclaimed admissions and financial aid manual, ***How To Pay For College Without Going Broke***. For further information on admissions and financial aid, please visit: [www.paylessforcollege.com](http://www.paylessforcollege.com).