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Your College Application Must Make You Shine

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By Dr. Rachelle R. Wolosoff

Eleven of the world's top fifteen universities are in the United States according to the 2010 U.S. News & World Report rankings. Whichever survey you would like to look at, most will rank the U.S. as having significantly more top universities than any other country. Many students come to the United States because of the diversity of educational opportunities available. There are more than 600 major fields of study offered at more than 3,800 colleges and universities.

Understanding the application process for American schools is critical to parents who want their children to attend the world's best universities. Getting into top American universities is very difficult as there are many well qualified applicants for each spot. So how does one get in? It's a highly competitive process that involves planning, good grades in both everyday classes as well as on standardized tests, such as the SAT and the ACT, extracurricular activities, and your application. To maximize your chances of admission, your college application must make you stand apart and shine.

Understanding the University

As an independent educational consultant, I spend weeks on end throughout the year visiting universities around America, speaking with their admissions directors and counselors, and learning about the schools firsthand. These meetings allow me to better understand the personality of the university, its academic focus, and the types of essays that are likely to stand out for their admissions officers. This is not the type of information that students can easily find on their own. However, it is essential knowledge for guiding students in the college search and application process.

The Common Application is NOT so Common

The Common Application or the university's own application is the document used to present the student in a way that best highlights his or her credentials, background, and interests. This may sound easier than it is. Some colleges accept the Common Application while many require their own unique application. The bottom line is that the Common Application is not so common! This causes a significant amount of additional work for the student. Some schools take pride in differentiating themselves by asking the most esoteric questions of their applicants. Many schools will ask for more than just the Common Application. In fact, the US college application process can result in ten or more supplemental essays based on general or specific school/programs. The supplemental essays required by many selective colleges necessitate significant planning to brainstorm and organize the content of each essay. Preparing a well written college application essay is very different than a well written high school essay. My students are often challenged by this task as it must be skillfully developed with each school's question specifically in mind. The essays must be written in a way that allows a student to be seen three-dimensionally.

The college resume, which is part of the application, is often given minimal focus, but it deserves significant focus for it must be crafted based on the student's activities in a logical and well designed format. After all, it says quite a bit about a student academically and socially. Students often think some of their activities are irrelevant, when in fact, they may be critical in distinguishing themselves from other candidates.

Important Factors to Consider

There are many factors that complicate the college search process. For example, think about the following items that must be considered when deciding on school application.

Once each of these factors, (as well as numerous others), is appropriately considered in order to fine-tune the college selection process, the student is more likely to experience not only college admission but college success!

The Early Bird Catches the Worm

Success comes to those who prepare well. This is well illustrated by the old English proverb; the early bird catches the worm. How early is early enough to start thinking about college?

If you are a freshman or a sophomore, you should be thinking about many things in anticipation of the college process.

1. Determine what your strengths and interests are and cultivate the connection of these with the activities that you are doing both in and outside of school.
2. Earn awards in areas in which you excel.
3. Take the practice ACT test and SAT test. Start to think about which one you are more comfortable taking. Consider obtaining tutoring for these tests.

If you are a junior, this should be your best academic year to date.

1. Start to plan out the best dates to take the actual SAT and/or ACT exams.
2. Strategize what courses you will take that are required, as well as the electives that might make your college application stand out.
3. Think about your recommendation letters and who will write them.

If you are a senior, the formal search has begun.

1. Formalize your resume of activities to be used for your college application. Make sure to include the details which can be narrowed down for the application itself.
2. Decide on your selection of colleges to which you will apply.
3. Include in your college list those schools that include varying degrees of selectivity, often referred to as “reach”, “target” and “safety” schools.
4. Organize which essays are required for the various schools you decide to apply to.

How Do Admissions Apply to International Students?

According to the recent Institute of International Education Open Doors Report for 2010, there has been a 3% increase in international students in the U.S. during the 2009/10 school year, totaling 690,923 students. The U.S. is a country that seeks out talented international students. China is the leading country sending students to the U.S. for a total of approximately 128,000 students, an increase of 30% from the previous year.

Students should review statistics on the number of international students that attend the colleges that they are thinking of applying to. It is critical that international students focus on what U.S. schools expect in terms of information provided on letters of

recommendations, the essay, resume and application in general. Essay writing for international students requires an understanding of US college application objectives which may include information that they might not normally be accustomed to presenting.

In Summary

The college search, application and essay process is one fraught with complications, strategy decisions, and lots of focused hard work. As previously noted, there are many qualified candidates for each spot in every selective school. It is essential that applicants maximize their opportunity to differentiate themselves in ways that make their uniqueness stand out and shine.

Free College Seminars in Beijing in April 2011; reserve your seats early by email.

I will be visiting Beijing April 18-April 25, sharing my expertise with students and parents who are interested in getting an inside view on the entire US college process. I will specifically be presenting FREE seminars to the public as follows, and welcome your attendance.

April 20, 7 pm at Yosemite Clubhouse, Shunyi (Tel: 8041 7588)

April 21, 10 am at Grandhills Clubhouse, Chaoyang (Tel: 8470 8686)

By Dr. Rachelle R. Wolosoff

Dr. Rachelle Wolosoff's credentials include a doctorate in Education Leadership. She continues to teach part time at university level in addition to her full time role as a college search expert. She has achieved the teaching profession's highest honor, National Board Certification, which requires satisfying the top teaching standards in the profession. In a prior career, she was a certified public accountant and has worked for one of the world's largest accounting firms as a senior manager. This gives her the firsthand ability to understand the connection between education and business and the need for education to be meaningful for learners.

Her website can be found at: www.CollegeSearchExpert.com

She can be reached by telephone at: 001-516-208-7835 or via email at: Rachelle@CollegeSearchExpert.com