



www.headedforcollege.com

TEN MYTHS IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

1. It is impossible to get into a good college.

For the 40 to 50 most talked about schools, it is true that competition is more intense than ever and accept rates seem to decline every year. But there are over 2,000 colleges and universities in the United States. Many of these schools are excellent and have high accept rates. Instead of focusing on how difficult it is to get in to a few well known schools, focus instead on finding the schools that are the best for you. Just because a school is very selective doesn't mean it is the best school for you.

2. Only the top ranked schools will prepare me for success.

The idea that only graduates of top 20 colleges are successful is pervasive, but not true. Numerous studies confirm that what you make of your college experience is far more important than where you attend. Need proof? Over half of the US Senate are graduates of public universities. Many incredibly successful people, for example Warren Buffet, Condoleezza Rice and Steven Spielberg, did not go to a "name" school and many were rejected from the top schools. In addition, though a university may not rank in the top 50, individual departments may rank very highly. Need more proof? The University of Arizona's Information Technology program is ranked #3, right behind MIT and Carnegie Mellon. Iowa State's Biological Engineering program is ranked #3, following Purdue and Illinois.

3. A college brochure in my mailbox is significant.

Colleges want to attract as many applicants as possible. Why? So they can collect more application fees and reject more students. This will fill their coffers and make their admissions statistics look more selective, and that matters for rankings. It's called "Attract to Reject." So enjoy the glossy brochures and clever postcards that arrive, but don't assume they mean that college wants you.

4. My essays won't matter that much.

Essays do matter, and admissions officers do read them. The essay may be the only opportunity you have to give the admissions committee insight into who you are. Start essays well before the deadlines, so you have time to contemplate topics and re-write several times. Do not seek outside help from someone who will change the voice of the essay. If it sounds like a 40 year old wrote it, you're in trouble. But a fantastic essay will not make up for poor grades or test scores-everything counts.

5. Colleges want well-rounded students with lots of activities.

Applicants do not need a long list of diverse activities, sports, volunteering, student government, summer volunteer trips to Africa... Colleges want to see students who are passionate in one or two areas and then intensely pursue those passions. It's about depth, not breadth. Colleges want a well-rounded class, but the class will be filled with individuals who are not at all well rounded.

6. Community service in a foreign country will impress admissions officers.

In fact, taking these high priced service trips can backfire because admissions officers are tired of reading about kids building houses in Mexico, working with orphans in Africa, saving the rainforests of Costa Rica... You do not have to travel to a far away country to perform meaningful community service. You can find people, organizations or causes in need of volunteers in your community.

7. Connections or VIP recommendations will get me in .

Admissions offices get so many letters from "connections" and VIPs that they could fill the entire class ten times over with those students. But that is not going to yield the diverse, motivated and interesting community of students the colleges want. Connections may mean your application will be read by the Director of Admissions, but if an applicant is not qualified, a letter or phone call will not help. Of course there are exceptions - very large donors and people with extensive, long-term ties to a school may make a difference, but only for candidates whose academics are competitive. A letter from your dad's college roommate who is now a VIP will not help your application either. Better to seek recommendations from teachers and advisors who really know you. Having a letter from a Senator or CEO will not impress an admissions committee-they have seen it all before, many times.

8. An "A" is always better than a "B".

A's are fantastic, but not always better than a "B". Admissions officers will look at grades in the context of the rigor of the curriculum. A "B" in a challenging AP course is better than an "A" in the easier regular course. The GPA is the same: 4.0. But, the story that "B" tells about the student who challenged herself says a lot more than the "A" from the student that took the easy route. So don't be afraid to take harder classes.

9. Without really high test scores, most colleges will not even consider me.

Study after study has shown that standardized test scores are poor predictors of academic success in college, and some colleges actually use this information. The list of test optional colleges is growing every year - recent additions are NYU and Wake Forest. So if standardized tests are not your thing, there will still be fabulous college options for you. If you are applying to colleges that require standardized tests, rest assured that the admissions office looks at all the elements of the application, not just test scores.

10. It's better if I take the SAT than the ACT.

Every college and university in the country accepts the ACT. In fact, in 2013, more ACTs were taken than SATs. So, you have a choice as to which test you take and the two tests are very different. You can focus on one, or take both. The choice is yours.