

What you should know about US COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

A sophomore at Dartmouth shares his thoughts on how to approach US college applications

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When I was tasked with writing this article on how to get into US colleges, I was a bit sceptical about whether I should actually do so. One of the reasons for this was that I vehemently dislike discussing my high school years, which I am glad I have already left behind. The other was that I simply do not know the answer to the question of how I got into Dartmouth. In fact, this is the primary reason why I don't respond to the questions I receive about applying to Dartmouth, all of which are sitting on my Facebook message requests.

Hence, I feel compelled to preface this article by saying that there is no "right answer" to the question of how to get into Dartmouth, or any top US college, as a matter of fact, and I do not have all the answers.

I think the most important aspect of any college application is academics. In terms of my grades, I did have at least all As throughout my O and A levels. In terms of my SAT score, I had a score in the upper-1500s range. However, I think it is important that people realise that academics are only a part of the puzzle of college admissions.

I remember that in a webinar organised by the admissions office of Davidson College, they mentioned that academics can only take you to the "door" of a certain institution, but whether or not you can cross that door depends on other factors, like your extracurricular activities (ECAs) and personal statements.

So, once we have figured out the academic part of the equation, it is important to talk about ECAs. I think this is where it gets very subjective in the sense that different people have different ECAs that they do throughout high school. In fact, a lot of successful Dartmouth applicants

in the past had drastically different ECAs to mine.

Some of my extracurriculars were focused on public policy, such as my work with the Youth Policy Forum or being on my high school's debate team. On the other hand, a lot of my other ECAs were more indicative of my creative aspects, such as my internship with *The Daily Star*, my podcast, or even the literature and philosophy-related summer programme I did as a part of Yale Young Global Scholars.

However, even if you do not do any of the activities listed above, you should not shed a sweat, because I know plenty of people who did very different things to get into Dartmouth. For example, I know someone who did a lot of science olympiad-related things. I also know someone in my class who did more theatre and visual arts-related ECAs. Therefore, you need to understand that there is no one solution or ECA which fits all. In fact, it is important that you do something that you are really passionate about so that you can convey your passion throughout your essays and supplements.

Speaking of essays and supplements, I think creating a compelling narrative that connects your extracurriculars to what you want to do in college is an important aspect of writing essays. Therefore, when you write your personal statement, think about the different activities you have done and how they have influenced your growth as a human being. Expressing your passion and growth is key to a good personal statement. I think a lot of people often misunderstand the purpose of college supplements. Colleges not only want to know why they are good for you. They also want to know how your presence will contribute to making the college campus and its community a better place.

In terms of resources for essays, I think the best resource is the College Essay Guy website, which has a ton of guides and examples on how to write personal statements and supplements.

Additionally, I think it is important that people realise that creating a balanced list of colleges is also an important part of the process. Blindly applying to Harvard, just because it is a top choice for most applicants, is probably not the most strategic move for college applications. Consider factors like whether or not your profile is "strong" enough for the college you are applying to. The amount of financial aid the college typically offers or if it is need-blind are also important factors.

I think in terms of understanding if your profile is good enough in terms of statistics, a good way is to use the Common Data Set which colleges release every year. They often have crucial information such as what aspect of the application the college focuses more on or what the median SAT score is like so that you know if you are above or below the median. They also potentially have information about the financial aid status of the colleges.

Furthermore, you should ideally ask for letters of recommendation (LoRs) from teachers who are best able to describe your character and contributions to the classroom. LoRs do not necessarily have to come from the Principal of your high school. They can also be from a class teacher or any member of the school's administration who you are close with. I, for example, did not ask my high school Principal for a recommendation.

Having said all of this, I think I should reiterate that college applications are a very subjective process. Once you have played the hand you are dealt well enough, things are really determined by factors outside of your control. With that being said, best of luck in putting the finishing touches on your application!

