

Dispelling Myths about College Admissions

There are many myths about the college admissions process. By sorting fact from fiction, you can focus your time and energy on what matters most.

Myth: Small independent colleges are likely to review your entire application, while larger public institutions are more likely to look just at numbers like GPA, and test scores.

- Not so. Many institutions, large and small, public and private, use complex, multi-step procedures for evaluating applicants. The process tends to be more complex for more selective colleges.

Myth: College X accepts everybody.

- No college accepts every candidate who applies. Open access or entitlement-type institutions may automatically accept students who meet minimum academic qualifications, but not applicants who don't meet those standards.

Myth: Interviews are required to be accepted.

Some colleges do request that you come in for an interview, but most don't—either because they couldn't manage to conduct an interview with each applicant or because they don't want to put applicants who can't travel to the college at a disadvantage. If you are able to travel to the campus for an interview, you should absolutely do so. In addition to learning more about the college from your interviewer, you can also learn firsthand what the school is really like, especially if you get to meet students and sit in on classes.

Myth: Colleges that have the highest yield rates are the best colleges.

"Yield" is the percentage of accepted students who then enroll in the college. High yield rates are considered desirable by organizations and publications that rank colleges. However, a college's yield rate is just a number and doesn't determine the quality of the education you can receive there. The best colleges for you are ones that can give you the educational opportunities and experience you want.

Myth: Essays aren't really important to college admissions.

Essays and personal statements are very important to colleges, especially to the most selective colleges and universities. And they're increasingly important to a wide range of institutions. Essays serve as a measure of your writing abilities and provide information about your personal background that is not revealed through your application or transcript alone. Think of your application essay as an opportunity to demonstrate your uniqueness to colleges and stand out from your peers.

Myth: It's impossible to figure out what a college is really looking for.

On the contrary, most colleges go to great lengths to specify what kinds of students they're looking for. College viewbooks and websites provide

extensive information about academic requirements, as well as profiles of previously admitted classes including their grades and test scores. You can learn even more by talking with admissions staff, students, faculty, or alumni.

Myth: When only one of two equally qualified candidates is accepted and the other is rejected, there's no rational basis for a college's admission decisions.

When this situation occurs, it likely means that the college received more applications from qualified students than it had spaces to fill. Most colleges spend a lot of time and energy considering what kind of student body they want long before any student applications even hit the desk. Many different factors go into admissions decisions, including ones that can't be added up, such as the interview and the application essay. Rejection hurts, particularly if it comes from a college you had your heart set on and where you thought you had a good chance for acceptance. Just remember, rejection doesn't mean the college's admissions process is irrational, nor does it mean that you're not as qualified as the person who got accepted.

Myth: There's nothing I can do to improve my chances of being accepted by the college I most want to attend.

Just as there's no guarantee you'll be admitted to a college, you should never take it as a given that you can't get in. The most important thing you can do, though, is to be realistic about your chances and create a balanced college list with a mixture of safety, match, and reach schools.

Perhaps the most harmful myth about college admissions is that there's one perfect school for you and your life will be ruined if you don't get in. You'd be surprised how many colleges can meet your educational and personal goals if you just keep an open mind and start looking.

Explore colleges and expand your college search at www.collegeboard.com/collegesearch.

For information on college applications, essays, interviews, and more, visit www.collegeboard.com/apply.