

PREPARING AN ACTIVITY LIST FOR YOUR COLLEGE APPLICATION

While a student's academic record---courses, grades, and test scores---is the most important factor in admission to college, activities and interests may play a key role. In fact, at some colleges, a student's record beyond the classroom will determine whether he or she is admitted. In general, the more competitive the college, the more important the non-academic record becomes. Why? Competitive colleges---schools admitting less than fifty percent of their applicants---have so many well qualified candidates that they will likely look at involvement beyond the classroom when crafting a freshmen class. On the other hand, most public universities base their decisions largely, though not necessarily exclusively, on the academic record. Therefore, students with a college prep curriculum, and acceptable grades, and test scores will usually be admitted. The same considerations hold true for less selective private colleges and universities. (Exceptions to this rule include national "flagships," such as the Universities of Michigan and Virginia.) The great majority of Edina High School students who apply to public universities, private comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges will be admitted if they meet the school's *academic* selection criteria.

Again, the non-academic record is vital when applying to more selective schools. With all their competitive applicants, it is paramount that you give a full account of your extracurricular record. These types of colleges will naturally expect an excellent--or with the most competitive schools, an outstanding--record in a strong program of studies. They will then look for other talents that you can contribute to the college's community. As Michelle Hernandez puts it in Acing the College Application: "strong academics open the door while a substantial talent may get you in."

How do I let the colleges know about my interests and talents? Most schools will have a chart to fill out and/or questions to be answered. The increasingly popular Common Application, used by about 300 colleges, also asks for activities, including years and extent of commitment. Unfortunately, while space for additional comments is available, the Common Application's chart doesn't offer suitable space to describe the activity. The same holds true with the regular applications of many colleges.

The response of many students to this situation is often a resume. In most instances, this is the wrong approach. To begin with, some students will start the resume with an educational goal or objective. Now, for a job application this makes sense, but it distracts from a college application. Of even more questionable value, many student resumes will list such items as courses, gpa, and test scores. This information should already be on other parts of the application and is thus redundant. A resume should not repeat what is in other parts of the application.

What is a better approach? An Activity List. Start by listing all activities, hobbies, interests, awards, employment, summer experiences, etc. According to this list, you then might follow one of two paths. The first path is organizing an Activity List into several categories. Students who are involved in a variety of activities should take this path. Here are some examples. Sally Springer and Marion Franck in Admissions Matters suggest:

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| Extracurricular Activities (including athletics) | Awards and Honors |
| Hobbies and Special Interests | Summer Activities |
| Work Experiences and Internships | Community Involvement |

Now, here are some other categories used by recent Edina High School graduates in preparation of their Activity List:

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| Student A: | Student B: | Student C: |
| Music Activities | Publications | School Sponsored Activities |
| Academic Enrichment Activities | Leadership | Employment |
| Work Experiences | Athletics | Athletic Activities |
| Community Service | Community Service | Activities Beyond School |
| Athletics | Religion | |

Preparing an Activity List

1. After forming categories, place them in order of importance.
2. Then arrange a chart which includes:
 - Activity
 - Years of involvement, including number of hours per week
 - Position(s) held
 - Brief description of activity
3. Be selective in choosing activities:

Include only activities participated in during high school. Given that Edina is a 10-12 high school, an activity that was participated in during 9th grade may also be included, especially if it was an interest built on throughout high school.

List activities in order of importance. If involvement in an activity was only for a short period of time, leave it out. A long list, which includes several activities with minor participation, is unhelpful.

4. Preparing a description of an activity

Concentrate on giving an informative, succinct description of key activities. Use clear terminology that admissions counselors will understand. Use everyday vocabulary, and spell out abbreviations.

Describe the activity **briefly**, unless it is something that is common knowledge. Then, write a concise description of your personal contribution to the activity, especially if you played a substantial role in developing or leading it. Use active verbs to describe these contributions. In addition include any awards or honors earned in the activity (you may want to include a separate category for awards/honors).

Don't repeat your essay. Both the Activity List and essay offer a chance to highlight accomplishments. However, try not to repeat information. If a lot of time is spent talking about activities in your essay, then there is no need to describe them deeply in the Activity List (and vice versa). It is okay to mention something in both places, but there is no need to go into great detail more than once. (source: www.csocollegecenter.org. Click on ask the experts).

What if I have very few school or community activities? Sometimes, the need to work or family responsibilities make it difficult to become very involved in activities. Employment can be turned to a student's advantage. Example: I once worked with a student with very few activities, but whose father ran homes for young adults with developmental disabilities. The student worked a good number of hours each week and assumed many responsibilities for this service. In addition, hobbies may also be included when filling out an Activities List. On another occasion, I worked with a student who had totally rebuilt a car engine. Another example: when I was working at the University of Minnesota, I read an application for a student from a small town in a rural part of the state who created his own web designs. I had his website evaluated by computer gurus within admissions at the University, who were very impressed with the student's talent. Even though his grades were lower than what the U wanted, he was accepted.

What if I focused on only one main activity or interest? There is another approach to describing activities or interests. Let's say you are involved in several activities, but one clearly stands out. You have been deeply committed to it for many years, and your accomplishments are particularly noteworthy. In this situation, you could focus the admissions staff's attention largely on this one activity. At many very competitive colleges, one exceptionally well developed talent can lead to an acceptance. An entire activity part of the application can be filled with this approach. An interest, let's say music, can also be mentioned with reference to the attached

Activity Sheet. In Making It Into A Top College by Howard and Matthew Greene, the authors describe the main categories for a student with extensive music-related experience:

Training
 Voice Lessons
 Piano Lessons
Dance
School Singing Groups
Musical State Productions
Music in the Community

As described above, the years of involvement, hours per week/month and description of the activities for each of the categories could then be added. In this case, the student might briefly describe her objectives in studying music at the college.

This type of Activity List is also appropriate for a student who wants to play intercollegiate athletics in a college. Because this type of Activity List can also be sent to coaches, a brief academic profile can also be added, including nature of curriculum, gpa, and class rank.

Please note: An Activity List does not replace completing the activities section of an application, including the Common Application. Rather, briefly fill in the activities section, and at the end state “please see attached Activity List.” Or, if you apply online, indicate that you will send a paper copy to admissions office.

Additional Suggestions

1. Put your name and social security number at the top of each page.
2. Be selective when including activities in the Activity List. Only an extraordinary background calls for more than two pages--strive to be compact and neat.
3. If an application gives sufficient room to name and describe activities, an Activity List is not needed.
4. If an application is submitted online, an Activity List should be sent by mail. Ask that it be included in your file. Increasingly, these materials will be electronically scanned to be read by an admissions officer.
5. Do NOT use colored paper for an Activity List. (In fact, completely avoid the use of colored paper in any materials. They may be scanned for computer reading and will not be picked up well.)
6. Use 10 font or above. Remember an admissions counselor may be reading your list at night. Use margins--white space is appealing.
7. Avoid organizing Activity Lists by grades. Also, in most cases the chart form is a better format than long paragraphs to present activities.
8. Have someone proofread the Activity List for misspellings, grammar, or even an activity that may have been left out.

Here is a sample Activity List. The ideas for these categories and activities have been drawn from lists of Edina graduates from the past three or four years to give you an idea of how to put together your own list. As you will note, we have made some changes; for example dates. They do not represent the activities of one individual.

In writing this piece, ideas were drawn heavily from Michelle Hernandez’s Acing the College Application (Ballantine, 2002). Suggestions from Making It Into a Top College (Harper Collins, 2000) by Howard and Matthew Greene, *Admission Matters* (Jossey-Bass, 2005) by Sally Springer and Marion Franck and the website, College Center (www.csocollegecenter.org) were also helpful.

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Format of an Activity List – Examples

“YOUR NAME”

“YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER”

SCHOOL SPONSORED (NOT ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES)	YEARS ACTIVE:	POSITION:	DESCRIPTION:
AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE CLUB	11 th grade-1 hour per week	Co-founder, Vice President, Secretary	My friends and I founded this club after realizing that our only exposure to sign language was during class. We decided to form this club for more practice.
STUDENT COUNCIL	Grade 12	Senior Representative	Student Council organizes student focused school activities such as: Community Service Projects, school dances, pep-fests and...this year as a senior representative, I am the voice of my grade. I am the leader of developing enthusiasm in this student body. We speak with administration and plan events that fit within the boundaries of school regulations, but are also fun enough to encourage student participation.
WINDIGO	12 10 hr/week	Layout Staff	<i>Windigo</i> , our school yearbook committee meets everyday to work on our publications. Although I am on layout staff, I contribute in other ways such as taking pictures or interviewing people. Being on layout is very time consuming and a large responsibility because often I have to stay after school to finish the layout in time for the deadline.
KEY CLUB INTERNATIONAL	11 1-2 hr/week	Senior Class Representative	Key Club International is sponsored by the local Kiwanis Club and was started at Edina High School five years ago. It encourages students to help the community through service projects and fundraisers. As senior class representative, it was my responsibility to communicate projects and volunteer opportunities to students in my grade. Throughout the year, we did various fundraisers and service projects.
CHAMBER SINGERS	Senior: Leader Junior: Member	Singer, key leader	Chamber Singers is an elite, madrigal ensemble formed from members of the Concert Choir at Edina High School. When I was selected my junior year, only two other juniors were chosen. Composed of eighteen voices, of which most are seniors, we rehearse twice a week during our off-season, taking one night for our concert music, and one day for our carols. During the holiday season, we perform everyday, and most days more than once until Christmas is over.

ATHLETICS	YEARS ACTIVE:	POSITION:	DESCRIPTION:
TRACK AND FIELD TEAM	10-12 15 hr/week	Captain	I have been on varsity for three years running the 300-meter hurdles. My best time is 48.6 seconds. I was sixth in conference, and qualified for section finals. I also am a triple jumper. I have lettered twice, was voted Most Improved last year and was elected one of the captains of the team.

LACROSSE	2003-2006	Center, Third Home, and Attack Wing. Captain	Lettered three years. Named captain for the 2005-06 season. Won third in state in 2004 and won second in state in 2005.
VARSITY COMPETITION CHEERLEADING TEAM	10 th -12 th (20 hr/wk Aug.-Mar.)	Captain	Voted captain senior year – duties include choreography of routines, organization of apparel and fundraisers, team motivation and enthusiasm, decision-making and problem solving. I am a liaison between coach, team members and parents.
ULTIMATE FRISBEE	2001-2003	Founder and Team Member	Founder and co-leader of Edina's Ultimate Frisbee, supported by Youth Development/Youth Service. Participants meet weekly for informal games. Organizing Ultimate Frisbee taught me the importance of careful planning and marketing to attract participants.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/ VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES	YEARS ACTIVE:	POSITION:	DESCRIPTION:
CONNECTING WITH KIDS: INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE BOARD	March 2004-present	Board Member	Connecting With Kids: Intergenerational Dialogue Board is a community board that focuses on how adults of all generations can connect with kids. One of my teachers recommended that I participate in a forum for the board in February 2003. Because of my ideas on creating a community youth board in Edina, they asked me if I would serve on the board. My responsibilities are to assist in implementing 14 actions that will allow adults to better connect with kids in the city of Edina, Minnesota.
TUTORING AT JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY	10 th Grade- 2 hrs week		Jefferson Tutoring is a group of students from Edina High School who went to Jefferson Elementary School in Minneapolis. I helped Spanish speaking children with their school work.
NERO-A ROCK BAND	Grades 9-12		Lead Guitar, Backup Vocals, Songwriter, Concert performances 2-3 a month. Performed at Edina High School, Minneapolis Parks, Red Sea, The Quest, First Avenue, Dinkytown, Dunn Bros., The Depot, Eclipse Records, Beaners, Triple Rock, The Lab, The Garage, and 7 th Street Entry.
AMY KLOBUCHAR SENATORIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN	May 2006-October 2006	Intern	Amy Klobuchar ran her Senate election campaign and needed volunteers and interns to assist her. I was a technology intern for all of the districts. I was responsible for assisting in the setup of office technology and networks. By July 2006, all of the offices had been setup so I moved to coordinating volunteer efforts for get-out-the-vote. Each intern was also responsible for attending parades and speeches. At the parades and speeches, interns were responsible for explaining her policies to constituents.
GREATER TWIN CITIES YOUTH SYMPHONY	Grades 11-12, 35 weeks/yr, 3 hour/wk		GTCYS is a group of youth orchestras, each directed by a different conductor. Playing in Concertina West in 11 th grade and Philharmonic in 12 th grade. The orchestras meet once every week to rehearse together, and perform several times throughout the year.

SOUTHDALE LIBRARY	27.6 hrs week/11 wks per yr	Volunteer	Researched and reworked library's PopLinks website ("PopLinks provides a sampling of {...}online sources, covering both popular and classical materials, for literature, music, theater, film, radio and television). Developed PowerPoint presentation, detailing features and use of website. Working on the website, I learned about the different cultural outlets for the myriad interests of library patrons. I improved my ability to create meaningful and informative presentations as I developed the PowerPoint training.
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EMPLOYMENT	DATES:	POSITION:	DESCRIPTION:
SKIJAMMERS	January 2004-present	Ski Instructor	SkiJammers is a local ski program that teaches kids how to ski. I participated in SkiJammers from ages 5-14. When I turned 14, they offered me a position as a ski instructor. After training for a year, I started teaching 8 to 10 year olds. I spend 9 hours on every Saturday in January and February teaching.
DEER LAKE APPLE ORCHARD	12 th grade-17 hrs/weekend for 6 weekends.	Concessions, manual labor working register, helping customers	While working at Deer Lake Orchard, I worked at the concession stand, sorted and bagged apples, as well as worked at the register and helped customers. The best part of working there was being exposed to so many different jobs at the same time. You are forced to multitask while still being productive.

AWARDS/HONORS	YEARS ACTIVE:	DESCRIPTION:
COMMUNITY SERVICE LETTER	2002-2004	Community Service Letter awarded for 763.75 hours of community service (120 hours required for letter) and completion of a project demonstrating knowledge and understanding of service. <i>More: A sentence or two on the project would have improved the description.</i>
BOOK AWARD RECIPIENT	Grade 11	Recipient of University of Richmond, Office of Admissions Book Award. Book awards are selected by the Edina High School faculty and are given to juniors who have excelled academically. "This award is given to a high school junior who exhibits extraordinary leadership in the academic arena as well as in extracurricular activities. This student must consistently demonstrate intellectual curiosity within the classroom that promotes discussion and enhances learning of others. In addition, this student has taken an active leadership role in a community service organization."