

Criteria for Getting Into College

Admission to college/university is very competitive. Consider University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. I offer this scenario as an example of what happens at college/university. What I'm going to say here about University of Michigan could be said about every college/university in the country.

Michigan is an excellent school, one of the best in the nation. Each year, Michigan has an entering class of about 6000 college students. For those 6000 seats in its first-year college class, Michigan receives close to 30,000 applications.

About Michigan

2010 Freshman Class Profile

- 30,947 Applications
- 15,436 Admitted
- 6,300 Enrolled
- Average High School GPA: 3.8
- Middle 50th Percentile of the Admitted Class:
 - ACT Composite of 28-32
 - ACT English of 28-34
 - ACT Math of 28-34
 - ACT Science 26-32
 - ACT Combined English/Writing of 27-31
 - SAT Total of 1960-2200
 - SAT Critical Reading 620-730
 - SAT Math 670-770
 - SAT Writing 640-740
- AP and/or IB Credit was granted to over 3000 new freshmen

Now, imagine that I'm a member of the Admissions Committee at University of Michigan. My responsibility on the Admissions Team is to accept only those applicants about whom I can make a reasonable prediction of satisfactory performance in college. But how can I make such a prediction? What information/data about an applicant will most reliably tell me he or she will have success in college?

Following is an example of how a college may evaluate you on some of the criteria or all of the criteria (Each college is different – check their website and admission offices for details).

College Freshman Application Rating Sheet

Guidelines for the Evaluation Procedure Freshman Undergraduate Admission Applicants for all Schools and Colleges

Secondary School Academic Performance Comments: Overall:

1. Cumulative GPA
 - a. Pattern of grade improvement in high school
2. Quality of curriculum:
 - a. Solid college-prep curr. (4 yrs. in each subject)
 - b. Strength of senior year courses
 - c. Core (required) courses beyond core curriculum
 - d. AP, IB and honors/college courses while in HS
3. Test scores (ACT, SAT).
4. Academic interest(s)
5. Class Rank

Educational Environment Comments: Overall:

1. Strength of curriculum (incl. Availability of AP, IB honors)
2. Average SAT and/or ACT scores
3. Percentage attending 4-year colleges
4. Competitive grading system in high school
5. Competitiveness of class
6. Academically disadvantaged school

Counselor and Teacher Recommendations Comments: Overall:

1. Character
2. Civic and cultural awareness/diverse perspective/tolerance
3. Commitment to high ideals
4. Intellectual independence/enthusiasm for learning/risk taking
5. Creativity/artistic talent
6. Concern for others/community
7. Motivation/determination/effort/initiative/persistence tenacity
8. Leadership potential/maturity/responsibility

Personal Background Comments:

1. Cultural awareness/experiences
2. Socioeconomic and educational background
 - a. First generation to go to college in family
 - b. Low economic family background
 - c. Economically disadvantaged region
3. Geographical considerations
 - a. In-State resident
 - b. Under-represented geographic area
4. Awards/honors (academic, athletic, artistic, musical, civic)
5. Extracurricular activities, service, and leadership
6. Participation in enrichment or outreach programs
7. Alumni relationships
8. Scholarship athlete
9. Work experience
10. Other (e.g. military, Peace Corp service: specify)

Evaluative Measures Comments:

1. Depth in one or more academic areas of student's interests
2. Evidence of academic passion
3. Grasp of world events
4. Independent academic research
5. Intellectual curiosity
6. Artistic talent
7. Writing quality: content, style, originality, risk taking

Rating scale: Outstanding – Excellent – Good – Average/Fair – Below Average/Poor

For most categories, the applicant may receive one of the above evaluation ratings. In some instances, the applicant's record will be assessed on the evidence of certain characteristics and attributes and the rating scale will not be applicable (e.g. personal background, geographical considerations). For these areas, the reviewer should assess the applicant's contributions to the University in qualifying terms. ***Extenuating***

Circumstances Comments:

1. Overcoming personal adversity/disadvantage/unusual hardships
2. Language spoken at home/ESL
3. Frequent moves, many different schools
4. Other

Source UofM.

If I just look at **personal essays**, for example, most of those will try to convince me that a given applicant will be the best college/university student anyone could ever want. That is, it's highly unlikely a personal statement will reveal anything about an applicant except the most flattering information. And the same can be said about letters of recommendation. There will be some special ones but still it is hard to make a choice simply on personal statements and recommendations.

Note: Not all colleges require Personal Essays – See College Application Form

Evaluations usually require two to three letters of evaluation from an applicant. Normally your guidance counselor will complete a counselor evaluation, which helps a college weigh your performance in high school. Usually guidance counselors will include a short personal letter of evaluation. One or two of your high school teachers will complete the second/third letter of evaluation. It will assess your performance in class as well as your character and personality.

Note: Not all colleges require Evaluations – See College Application Form

Being a **well-rounded student** can't be overlooked. Did he/she do extra-curricular activities other than sports? What about community service? Was there leadership situations?

How would I get to be selected?

Suppose I look at high school grade point averages (**GPA**). They may give me some reliable data. How a person has performed academically in the past might accurately predict how he or she will do in the future. So I might develop a strategy of first admitting all those people with 4.0 GPAs and then work backward from 4.0 until the entering college/university class is filled.

But there's a problem with this strategy. The 30,000 applicants have attended more than 850 (est.) different high schools in the United States and abroad. How do I know that a 4.0 GPA at one high school represents the same level of achievement as a 4.0 at another high school? One High school might have very high academic standards, while another might not. So an "A" at one school is not the same as an "A" somewhere else. Also, one student with a 4.0 GPA might have taken non-challenging classes, while another 4.0 student from the same high school may have taken a more challenging course load (**Strength of Schedule**). So, two 4.0 GPAs of students from the same school may not represent comparable academic achievements. Thus, even using GPA, I can't be 100% sure about choosing the incoming freshman class, but it is considered.

What else should be considered? The College Admissions Test (**SAT/ACT**). This is an examination every college and university applicant must take, which is graded uniformly across all applicants. So the presumption is the SAT/ACT is a dependable measure for an admissions advisor to compare all 30,000 applicants with each other.

Let's take a look at how much University of Michigan relies on the SAT/ACT. The information below represents the SAT/ACT scores for those applicants recently who had a 3.8 GPA or better. In other words, these are the most promising applicants in terms of their academic performance in college.

ACT/SAT Score Conversion Charts

New SAT & ACT Score Comparison

ACT	Math & Critical Reading only SAT combined <i>for NCAA purposes</i>	NEW SAT
36	1600	2400
35	1560-1590	2340
34	1510-1550	2260
33	1460-1500	2190
32	1410-1450	2130
31	1360-1400	2040
30	1320-1350	1980
29	1280-1310	1920
28	1240-1270	1860
27	1210-1230	1820
26	1170-1200	1760
25	1130-1160	1700
24	1090-1120	1650
23	1060-1080	1590
22	1020-1050	1530
21	980-1010	1500
20	940-970	1410
19	900-930	1350
18	860-890	1290
17	810-850	1210
16	760-800	1140
15	710-750	1060
14	660-700	1000
13	590-650	900
12	520-580	780
11	500-510	750

The above numbers show the importance the SAT/ACT is to “some” college school admissions.

How can students prepare for SAT/ACT?

Years ago, a survey was sent to many college deans across the country. One of the questions on the survey was what classes the deans recommended students have in high school in order to prepare effectively for college. The four classes most frequently recommended by the deans were English, History, Math, and Government. So it proves those students wanting to go to college are they take as many classes in the subjects listed above as they can while in high school. I advise students to take the most demanding courses because they are the ones who will help develop the analytical thinking skills so necessary for success on the SAT/ACT.

It is difficult to prepare for taking of the SAT/ACT. But one can prepare for it by developing knowledge with its design through taking practice tests based on actual questions asked in past SAT/ACT (See Free On-line Practice/Prep tests at my website). One should not to be surprised when taking the SAT/ACT by the kinds of questions asked. The general type of question asked can be familiar to you by taking an SAT/ACT preparation test or purchase one of the many practice books available at bookstores.

SAT/ACT prep courses may improve exam performance, However, I have no data that supports the taking of a prep class and test results. Students should also understand how and why they make mistakes on the test so they can be prepared if they take the test a second or third time.

I recommend that a student take both tests and multiple times if necessary to get a good benchmark. Some student's score higher on one test than the other (Use the highest score for your application). See my website (<http://dreammentorprogram.com/Links.aspx>) for the differences between the SAT and ACT Test. It is equally important to understand that a combination of a good GPA and SAT/ACT score can mean thousands of dollars in scholarship money.

Mr. Campbell

Updated 10/2/09

I received the following question from Mr. Freeman after reading the above write-up. My response to Mr. Freeman follows the question.

Mr. Campbell – the article is very interesting. As an engineer, I just wonder if the admissions people have ever done any sort of correlation study. In other words, which indicator (GPA, test score, extra-curr activity, ...) fits best with collegiate GPA?

Mike Freeman

Mr. Freeman,

After exploring and researching over 150 different colleges for students and determining the admission requirements for each I put together the write-up (Criteria for College) based on my findings. However, I have also read many articles on the subject and the majority of articles and colleges all agree to the standard criteria stated in my write-up gets considered in a student's application.

Many colleges put different "emphasis" on the criteria. Like you, coming from a business background (Quality & Process Director - AT&T) some college's use the word 'weight' in their determination factors but they add no meaningful values to their statements.

Others use "averages" Most colleges report on the *average* scores of entering freshman (Often called a Freshman Profile). Use this as a guideline, but not as an absolute since these are averages, not the highest or lowest scores.

Some schools are less particular and evaluate scores in combination with other criteria on your application. I find when people or institutions use only averages to make a determination it is because they are looking for a quick indicator that most often does not represent the best possible solution. Why do so many use it? They use it because it is a simple indicator that most people can understand. I would at least like colleges to use Central Tendency (Mean, Mode, and Medium) measures in some of their decisions.

In regards to High School GPA and other criteria most admissions people will tell you they don't use GPA as a projector of Collegiate GPA but rather as one indicator that determines if a student will be successful in college (going past two years). The final acceptance decision in most cases is "**subjective**" based on human interaction by an Admissions person or team for the final decision.

How does one overcome subjective decision making? In my humble opinion I believe the best indicator is how a student sells themselves during one on one meetings with college admission officers and representatives from the department of study (if known) that a student plans on studying.

I strongly stress to each student (Vocally & in their CDMP Plan) and parents that I meet to make sure (if possible) that a one on one meeting is done with the colleges of choice. It is like a job interview for getting hired it is your time to sell yourself. The resume and college application are your entrance to an interview when you are trying to get a special job position or trying to get in a prestige school or need to explain why a high/low GPA or high/low ACT Score is what the student is all about.

One of the main ingredients of the CDMP program is for each student to create a "Portfolio Folder" that contains information (College Criteria) from their high school career that is based upon my findings of the different admissions criteria that can be found in a college application.

For each of the criteria a college admission team or individual will evaluate those to determine what kind of student you are and what kind of student you will potentially become.

What I do with each student once a college is selected is to print out the application and determine the best method we can to display and provide the criteria they are requesting to be the most critical.

I do not like to leave anything to chance and waiting until your junior & senior year can reduce the chances drastically to gain acceptance to college.

Updated 12/07/2010

Academics and College Acceptance

In evaluating your application, your high school transcript is almost always the most important ingredient. (Keep in mind that there are exceptions to this rule, especially for students in areas like art, music, and drama.)

Admission officials are skilled at understanding the discrepancies among schools and the ways that grades are awarded, recorded, etc. They know, for example, that at some schools, only students who walk on water will earn A's, while at others, anyone who hands in their homework is considered an honors student.

They also recognize that good students at challenging, competitive high schools (public or private) may have lower grades and class ranks than their counterparts at easier ones, and that some students may not be ranked -- or even graded -- at all

College acceptance: Know what you're up against

It's important to know early on what sort of college you hope to attend and what the requirements are to receive a positive college admission letter -- and plan your high school curriculum accordingly. Work closely with your High School guidance counselor (Ms. Mizak).

To earn your diploma, many high schools require successful completion of a basic curriculum that looks pretty similar to the one below. Keep in mind that this course strategy is a bare minimum:

- English: 4 full-year courses or equivalent
- Social Studies/History: 2 years
- Mathematics: 2 years
- Science: 2 years
- Physical education, health, and electives

Meeting these requirements (and doing only that) may get you into several not-so-selective schools. More competitive institutions will expect your transcripts to reflect curriculum that looks more like this:

- English: 4 years
- Social Studies/History: 3 years
- Mathematics: 3 years
- Science: at least 2, but preferably 3 years
- Foreign Language: 3 years of 1 language or at least 2 years of 2 languages

If you want to be competitive for the best schools, you should sign on for a strong four year academic program that should look like this:

- English: 4 or more years
- Social Studies/History: 3 or 4 years
- Mathematics: 4 years through calculus (or at least through pre-calculus)
- Science: at least 3 years (with 2 or more lab sciences).
- Foreign Language: 4 years of at least one language

Extracurricular Activity Involvement Affects College Acceptance

When admission professionals evaluate your extracurricular activities, there are a few things they are likely to take into consideration during their committee meetings:

Dedication

The significance of your contribution is often a factor in the admissions decision. Admission professionals often favor depth over breadth. For example, while Jill may attend almost every weekly chess club meeting, George organized a chess clinic and tournament at a nearby junior high, creating such a success that he ran a second one at a homeless shelter and persuaded local merchants to donate prizes.

Leadership

"Evidence of leadership" is a phrase that comes up often at admission decision committee meetings, and it can be what separates you from someone who ends up on the waitlist. There's a world of difference between the student who joined the History Club and the one who founded it. The more selective a college is, the more carefully your leadership role is examined.

Balance

While there may not be as much talk of "well-roundedness" as there used to be, diverse ventures appeal to admission officers who are offering college acceptance. If you participate in the science club, drama club, and tennis team, you'll usually stand out more than someone who only chooses athletics. If you're a good, but not exceptional athlete, put other things on your activity roster. Similarly, balancing school-related activities (clubs, teams, choirs, etc.) with those taking place elsewhere (volunteering, scouting,

church groups, community theater, etc.) suggests that your horizons extend beyond the schoolyard.

True involvement

Volunteerism is very important, and the key here is real, hands-on involvement. Admission people are usually able to differentiate between the candidate who spends every Saturday at a homeless shelter and the classmate who spent an hour on the Float decoration for homecoming. The person with real involvement is much more likely to get that college admission letter.

Essay, Recommendation Letters, and Interview

The personal essay and college acceptance

A great essay can really make an admission official sit up and take notice, although personal preference may prevail. Some evaluators are all about content and are impressed by sophistication and insight, while others won't get past your writing style and mechanics if there are errors. How do you know what you'll be evaluated on? You probably won't, unless it's been clearly defined in the application materials.

Letters of recommendation in the admission decision

The quality and depth of letters of recommendation varies between colleges:

In general, admission professionals look for recommendations that include:

- **Comparisons to others** in the class, to those whom the teacher or counselor has worked with in past years, or with students who have enrolled at the college in question ("In twenty years of teaching, I have encountered few students as determined as Joan.")
- **Information about grading and/or competition** ("This year's Advanced Placement English class was the most able this school has ever seen.")
- **Illustrative examples or anecdotes** ("Rachael is the swim team captain and a state record holder in the backstroke. However, her sensitivity is another special strength. She stays late after every practice to help a far weaker swimmer, to keep her from being cut from the team.")
- **Other personal traits or study habits** (e.g., maturity, response to criticism, acceptance by peers, timely completion of assignments, willingness to go beyond what is expected, participation in class)

Personal Interview

Interviews are often used to confirm the impression made by the credentials in your folder. An interview may help a committee to see another side of you, to understand why

you made certain choices, or to appreciate the extent of your commitment. In other words, a good interview can go a long way toward getting you in.

Sources of Information:

- CDMP Website Program
- Peterson's for College
- Princeton Review
- Fisk guide to Colleges
- University of Michigan Website