



Extracurricular Activities: What They Mean in College Admissions

Maybe you're a bowler. It could be that you're a ballerina. Perhaps you're a president, a secretary, or a volunteer.

When it comes to **extracurricular activities**, there is one thing you have in common with most other applicants to college: the admissions office wants to know more about what you do when you aren't in your high school classes.

In this article, Go See Campus covers...

- how admissions offices interpret extracurricular activities
- things to keep in mind when presenting extracurricular activities as part of your application.

What Do Your Extracurricular Activities Tell Admissions?

You might ask whether an admissions officer really needs to know that you were the treasurer of the Potato Peeling Club in your junior year of high school. Actually, it may be important. Take a look at some of the things that extracurricular activities can say about you...

1. Extracurricular activities suggest ways that a student will contribute to campus life. For example, if you are active in theatre, you may be an attractive candidate to a university that wants to grow its drama program. It isn't just the activities that matter; it's also your attitude. High school students who are enthusiastic in their application about participating in college organizations can make a great impression.

Remember, your enthusiasm seems more genuine if you have a track record in the activity you want to do in college. Think about it: if you have never been part of a school play, saying that you are excited about starring in college productions may not be as meaningful to the admissions office.

2. Extracurricular activities can demonstrate a student's character. If you have spent a great portion of your time involved with a charity or cause, it suggests that you are generous and have concern for others. You can show these qualities better in your application if you go beyond just describing the activity. Explain the personal meaning that the work has for you and give the



admissions office a better sense of who you are.

3. Extracurricular activities can hint at a student's future professional interests.

Do you build websites for local businesses? Or, do you help publish a school newspaper? When you can point to achievements that may turn into a career, you indicate to a college that you are focused and passionate about your interests.

Your achievements stand out even more if you want to major in a related field (for example, a student who has helped promote her family business and who wants to major in marketing). Also, it's great if the extracurricular activity has earned you recognition, such as awards or competition placements.

4. Extracurricular activities can model how a student handles adversity. Because of economic constraints or other limitations, some students may not have access to typical extracurricular activities. Others spend their time working to support their families.

These experiences can be used to show the student's maturity, responsibility, and ability to manage challenges. Students should consider how caring for their family or working for wages has contributed to their interest in a particular college or career. Also, they should demonstrate how these experiences will help them add to the school they want to attend.

Keep in mind when writing about your extracurricular activities...

- You don't need to have participated in a large number of them. It's great if you have explored a variety of clubs, organizations, and hobbies. However, if you have committed limited time to each, these experiences may give your application less value. Instead, you may want to identify the extracurricular activities that mean the most to you, and try to get as much out of them as possible.
- Titles are less important than action. Whether you are vice-president or president of a club, you may be able to accomplish a great deal and demonstrate just as much leadership.
- When you describe your extracurricular activities, it's good to talk about your own accomplishments. However, the admissions office may find it helpful to know about the ways that you supported, improved, and



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influenced the work of others.

- Showing your uniqueness is a good idea. However, you may look at your extracurricular activities in frustration, thinking about how many students have had similar experiences in varsity athletics, as a camp counselor, or in other roles. The good news: you can still tell the admissions office what these activities mean to you and why they make the college a good fit.

So, bowlers, ballerinas, and all those in between: give admissions the real story on what you do and why it matters. It can make a big difference in your application.

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