

## College Admission Myths

The college search and application process is a long grueling process. Because choosing a college is such an important decision, it is imperative that there are no misunderstandings when it comes to the application and decision making process. In the following article we will take a look at some of the most common college admission myths, and the truths that lie behind them.

**Myth:** If you haven't heard of a college, it can't be good.

**Truth:** There are hundreds of colleges out there, so you may not hear about or be familiar with many of the different universities this country has to offer. Most people only know of certain colleges because of where they live or the colleges that get the most publicity, usually from college sports or college rankings. Many great colleges do not get exposure where it counts: Academics.

**Myth:** You should base your college decision on college rankings.

**Truth:** These rankings should not be used as your guide on what colleges to apply to. In reality, despite the amount of press coverage rankings receive, they don't mean very much. Only 46% of schools returned the questionnaire which counts as 25% of the total rankings of U.S. News & World Report's college rankings.

**Myth:** The earlier you send in your college application the better.

**Truth:** At most schools, it does not matter when you send in your application, so long as it gets there before the application deadline. Sure, it's a good idea to prepare and have your application ready, as well as any admission essays complete ahead of schedule, but don't think you're increasing your chances by turning in your application months before the deadline. Only those students who apply with early decision can increase chances of admission by applying early.

**Myth:** You won't get into college with a below average SAT score.

**Truth:** There are many factors admission offices look for in its applicants. Your test scores will be used in combination with your grades, class rank, activities/leadership, and the type/difficulty of classes you took in high school. Of course there are schools out there that don't require a test score at all for admission. As long as you took a somewhat challenging course load and put up decent grades, you should have nothing to worry about.

**Myth:** It's better to get good grades than take challenging courses.

**Truth:** Taking advanced courses and getting passing grades indicates to a college that you can handle challenging courses. A challenging course load with some AP courses will help you get into more selective colleges.

**Myth:** The more extracurricular activities the better.

**Truth:** The three main things (most) colleges look at are GPA, test scores, and admission essays. A ton of extracurricular activities will not necessarily make up for poor grades or a low test score. Among a pool of similar applicants however, a solid track record of extracurricular activities can give one student an edge over another. Colleges prefer students who show passion and interest in an activity. If you are enthusiastic and show leadership qualities in a certain activity, it can certainly help.

**Myth:** Minorities are shoo-ins for admission.

**Truth:** In most cases, checking the box on the application declaring your minority status will not increase your chances of admission. However, minorities may be able to strengthen their case for admission by using their first hand experience in the form of the admission essay. Perhaps explaining to admissions officers how you overcame your minority status and went on to be successful can help.

**Myth:** Being a legacy increases your chance of admission.

**Truth:** Put it this way...apply to more colleges than just the one(s) your parents went to. Having a parent who attended the school you're applying to carries only some weight, depending on the college. If anything, there may be even more pressure on you. What value a legacy does have is determined by each individual school and how much your parent(s) gave to the university in the form of donations.

**Myth:** If you're a sports star you'll get a free ride through college.

**Truth:** Just because you are/were a sports star in high school does not guarantee that you'll get a free ride into college. College teams can only offer a certain amount of scholarships, and you'll be going up against a lot of demand/competition. Some athletes even 'walk on' to a sports team, hoping to later be offered a scholarship the next year. Being a sports star is no easy ticket, if anything, there will be more academic requirements expected from you.

**Myth:** Only the top students receive financial aid.

**Truth:** If you are admitted and show financial need, colleges will make it possible for you to pay for it with grants, scholarships, and loans regardless of how great of a student you are. The only time this myth may be true is when it comes to merit-based scholarships.

**Myth:** The more you save for college the less financial aid you'll receive.

**Truth:** While savings does count as a portion of the family's assets in determination of financial need, the federal government does not count all of the assets, just a fraction.

**Myth:** Public colleges are cheaper than private colleges.

**Truth:** This may seem true at first glance with the college's advertised sticker price, but in many cases a private college can usually offer you more financial aid, making it a cheaper option.

**Myth:** Visit a college after you've been accepted.

**Truth:** While this is a good idea, many prospective students don't explore and visit colleges BEFORE they apply. The problem with this is they apply and get accepted to a college, only to later visit and realize it's not a good fit for them. If you can, visit both before and after you apply and get accepted. Yes, this will cost more money travel wise, but choosing a college is a lifetime decision and one you don't want to mess up.

**Myth:** Once you're accepted, you have nothing to worry about.

**Truth:** Wrong! Slack off on your school work and you'll get poor grades, which leads to academic probation. If you don't keep your grades up, you can be kicked out of school.

**Myth:** You need to pick a major before you begin college.

**Truth:** It is good to have a general idea of what you want to do (as it helps in your college search), but you usually don't have to declare a major until the end of your sophomore year. Certain colleges are obviously better for certain degrees/majors. Once you do decide on a major, be sure to do an internship related to the career early in your path to obtaining a degree. This way you get a feel for the type of work, and you'll know if it's something you want to do for the rest of your life.

**Myth:** You need to decide on a career before you choose a college.

**Truth:** College is your time to explore. Don't rush into your decisions, you can choose a major in your sophomore year and still complete the degree in four years. Lots of students decide what they want to get into after taking a few electives that stir up their interests.

Myth: You have to go to college if you want a good job and make lots of money.

Truth: College is not about getting a job. Sure, it helps, but know that there are many successful people out there with no college degree at all.

This is part two of a three part series that includes college myths, college admission myths, and college urban legends.