



# Getting into a 4-year College

The 5 critical factors in determining 4-year college entrance are:

- grades
- secondary level coursework
- extracurricular activities
- community service experiences
- essays
- teacher recommendations

- 1. Grades:** There are a variety of 4-year colleges – private and public. There are elite private and public colleges that seek students with GPA's of above 3.0. There are other institutions that will take students with lower GPA's. Most colleges will provide the average GPA for the most recent class on their website. This will give you a better idea of which college best matches your transcript. Students who have experienced a personal trauma during high school that impacted their GPA may be given special consideration (for example, if a parent died during your sophomore year and your grades suffered, you may be able to speak with an admissions officer to explain this section of your transcript).
- 2. Coursework:** There is a difference between high school graduation requirements and college entrance requirements. For example, students who plan to attend 4-year institutions should take at least two consecutive years of the same foreign language. Students who speak a language other than English at home should see if their home language should see if their language qualifies. These students should be able to speak, read and write in this language. Oftentimes, these students will be required to take a test to prove their competence in the language. Students who plan to attend a 4-year college should also take four years of English, mathematics, history and science, even if their high school requirements do not require these courses. Finally, students who plan to attend an elite school should be sure to take a challenging course load that includes some honors and/or AP courses.

- 3. Extracurricular Activities:** These activities could include athletics, performing arts opportunities, student government and/or cultural clubs. Colleges are looking for well-rounded students who are not just strong academically but who have other interests they explore outside of the regular course load. However, on the other hand, colleges want to see consistency in the behavior of students. Students should demonstrate similar interests over the course of their high school careers and shouldn't jump from one activity to another each semester or each year.
- 4. Community Service:** Colleges now want to see students take an interest in their communities. High school students should select one to two activities on which to focus over time. College admissions officers like to see students with a passion in a particular area.
- 5. Essays:** Not all colleges require essays. However, almost all elite college applications will require at least one to two essays. Generally these essays will require students to consider their interests and to reflect on their past experiences. The essay prompts for most colleges do not often change much from year to year, so students may look at these essay options during their junior year and begin the process of writing these essays. As students prepare their essays, they should ask for help in the revision process. Proofreaders could be students. However, many English teachers are more than willing to help in this process if students are willing to provide their essays for proofreading long before these essays are due. College application essays should be well-organized, should respond directly to the questions asked and should have no spelling or grammatical mistakes.
- 6. Teacher Recommendations:** These recommendations are critical to the success of a college application. Beginning at the end of junior year, students may ask teachers to write letters of recommendation. Students should be intentional about which teachers they choose to ask for recommendations. They do not need to ask the teachers in whose classrooms they were most successful, but they should ask teachers to write recommendations who can speak of the student's work ethic, their perseverance and a positive academic attitude. Teachers should be asked to write recommendation letters no less than one month prior to the due date for the application. Finally, students should provide extra information, such as any awards they have received, any clubs in which they participate, and their current GPA to assist the teacher in writing a thorough letter of recommendation.