

Extracurriculars Matter — To You and To Colleges

Do colleges want quality or a quantity of activities?

Jeff Brenzel, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions, Yale University

An admission officer talks about the role of high school activities in an application.

Getting involved in clubs, sports, work or other pursuits outside the classroom can give you new skills and help you learn about yourself — and can be fun.

Here's something else you should know: Extracurriculars also play a part when you apply to colleges. Most college applications ask about your activities. That's because the things you do in your free time reveal a lot about you — in ways that grades and test scores can't. Your accomplishments outside the classroom show what you're passionate about and that you have qualities valued by colleges. Here are a few examples:

- Serving in student government shows that you have leadership skills.
- Being on the track team through high school shows that you're able to make a long-term commitment.
- Doing volunteer work at a hospital shows that you are dedicated to helping others.
- Working a part-time job while keeping your grades up shows that you are responsible and can manage your time.

Colleges want to know who you are and what you can do. Your activities help you show them. So put down the books and get out there!

Kinds of Activities

Here are the most common kinds of extracurricular activities.

Your extracurricular activities help you show colleges who you are.

School Activities

These might include sports teams, special-interest clubs, a school newspaper, music groups and student government.

Community Activities

Examples are community theater, music, and art groups as well as local clubs and sports teams.

Work

Internships, summer jobs, part-time work, babysitting, delivering newspapers — it all counts.

Volunteering

This might mean tutoring elementary school kids, helping out at the animal shelter or raising funds for a charity.

How to Get Started

Whether you want to learn more about politics, public speaking or cooking, you can find an activity that will help you explore that interest. Here are some ideas for starting your search:

- Ask your friends what groups they belong to.
- Check your school's bulletin boards or website.
- Talk to your school counselor or your teachers about activities.
- If you have a place of worship, find out if it organizes activities.
- Look into national organizations, such as Junior Achievement, Girl or Boy Scouts, and the YMCA or YWCA.

- Think about starting your own club or group.

Student Stories

As these students found, an extracurricular activity can introduce you to a lifelong passion, give you new perspectives or show you that you can achieve amazing things.

Katie Found a Major

Katie, a high school senior, says that after joining her school's drama club, she finally found something she loves. She's heading to college to earn a degree in technical theater, where she'll learn to work behind the scenes to bring plays to life.

Kelsey Expanded Her Horizons

Kelsey, a college junior, says that her activity shaped her into the person she is today.

In high school, Kelsey joined a community-based club that focuses on empowering girls. Spending time with the group's members — who came from diverse backgrounds — helped Kelsey become more open-minded toward people who are different from her. And taking on leadership roles in the organization built Kelsey's confidence. "The program gave me the opportunity to learn about myself in a positive environment," she says.

Ben Learned He Could Make Things Happen

Ben, a college freshman, says that his experience made him "realize that the world is full of possibilities."

Ben started a charity golf tournament when he was 10 years old to raise money for a local hospital. By the time he graduated from high school, the tournament had raised more than one million dollars.

Recommended

Character Counts: What Are Colleges Looking For?

Did you know that admission officers are interested in your personal qualities as well as your grades? Find out what traits colleges look for.

3 Ways to Approach Common College Essay Questions

College applications usually contain one of three types of essay questions. Find out what they are and learn the best strategies for answering them.