

Importance of extracurricular activities in high school

By Schools.com 10:40 am EST December 22, 2011



Normal Community West High School sophomore Jacob Bacon juggles while lying at the floor at The Normal West Juggling Club in Normal, Ill. (By Lori Ann Cook-Nestler, AP)

While transcripts and test scores play the biggest role in determining [college admissions](#), extracurriculars can help you stand out from the crowd. They are a [great way to show your individuality and demonstrate key qualities](#) that college admissions boards want to see, like motivation and time-management. But is there such a thing as too many extracurricular activities?

Believe it or not, there are cases where loading up on extracurricular activities can actually hurt your chances of admission more than it helps. Here are some dos and don'ts to consider when building or managing your list of extracurricular activities in high school.

Don't join activities just to get into college

Admissions officers go through hundreds or thousands of applications each semester. They can spot a padded list of extracurriculars from a mile away. If you're frantically joining any group that will have you for a member just to impress college admissions boards, slow down and rethink your strategy.

Don't overdo it

Ultimately, your academics are the number one priority throughout high school. Becoming overly involved in one or many out-of-school activities can

take away from your study time and negatively affect your grades, which will influence your chances of admission the most. Remember that academics come first and consider lessening the extracurricular load if it begins to feel too heavy.

Do focus on quality, not quantity

The number one thing to remember about extracurriculars is that it's not the number that counts, but the depth of your involvement in the activity.

Whether it's volunteer work at a soup kitchen or a starring role on the basketball team, college admissions boards want to see passion, dedication and involvement over the long haul. It's much more desirable to have two or three extracurriculars to which you are truly devoted, than to load up on superficial activities that you don't care much about.

Do consider your talents, interests and skills

Put some thought into which activities you take on in high school. After all, each group you join or volunteer assignment you spearhead will take valuable time and energy. Look at your talents and passions and choose accordingly. A gifted writer might benefit more from a spot on the school newspaper than a position on student council, for example. There will always be popular activities or groups you feel might impress admissions officers more than others. But stick to your real interests and trust that that will shine through in your

Most students know that leadership is an important quality that admissions officers look for in applicants. But being president of a group or captain of a team isn't the only way to demonstrate leadership. Show initiative by starting a group on your own, whether it's a Latin club or a ping-pong team. If you're passionate about the topic and you don't see anything else like it at your school, go for it!

Also, think outside the box when it comes to highlighting leadership roles on

teams and groups you're already a part of. List projects you've headed or any significant roles you've played in helping a group reach a goal.

Do take advantage of summer

Whether it's a summer job scooping ice cream or an [internship](#) at a law firm, take advantage of the summer months to build your life experience. Summer is a great time to focus on extracurricular activities because it's the one time of year when your involvement won't hinder your academic growth.

Do be consistent with your activities

Demonstrating how "well-rounded" you are by joining a wide range of extracurricular activities can sometimes backfire. What you see as diverse interests, admissions officers may see as flaky or unfocused, especially if you're picking up and dropping a slew of activities each year. While it's certainly okay to explore new interests in high school, be sure to stick with your core activities, too. An activity that you can show consistent involvement with from freshman to senior year will impress admissions officers more than five or six groups you've joined and dropped over your time in high school.

Do follow your passions

Remember there are no right or wrong activities. Admissions officers want to know what you do when you're not in school, even if this does not include traditional extracurricular involvement. Taking care of younger siblings or working part-time counts just as much as the tennis team or chess club. If it expresses your individuality and your passions, admissions officers want to know about it.