

# Extracurricular Involvement:

## What is a Student to do?

When a student starts their high school career, they often ask how their involvement in extra-curricular activities affects their chances of admission to college. Overall, there are many activities available to students at UHS that will allow them to showcase their talents and achievements. However, with so many programs, organizations, teams, and clubs to choose from, students often have a difficult time selecting the right activities to participate in, that will positively impact their college admissions.

One common misperception is that students must participate in as many extra-curricular activities as possible to stand a chance of being admitted to the college of their choice. While participation in extra-curricular activities is certainly an important component of the admissions process, in our experience it is better for students to carefully choose activities that will allow them to demonstrate dedication to a particular activity, a high level of specialization in that activity, leadership, and balance.

## What Are Colleges Looking For?

When college admissions committees review a student's application, they will consider the following factors when evaluating their extra-curricular resume:

***Dedication.*** Colleges like to see that students have a passion for something specific and would prefer to see "depth" of involvement over "breadth." For example, colleges would prefer to see a student volunteer at a local hospital every week throughout their high school tenure rather than a student who volunteers at four different venues once each year. Additionally, colleges will be evaluating a student's dedication based on the depth of their involvement in an extra-curricular activity. Therefore, a student who is a passionate musician will stand out more if the student provides music lessons to under-privileged youth, and is the founding member of a music group on campus, than a student who simply participates in multiple performing groups.

***Specialization.*** Students will impress a college admissions committee if they are truly talented and involved in one particular area. For example, a student who wins a national award in forensics or debate will stand out more than a student who dabbles in forensics and math team, but is not distinguished at the state or national level in either organization.

Colleges often appreciate uncommon undertakings. As such, participation in activities such as BMX, skydiving, and even hand-bell ringing may stand out more than more common activities such as student council, yearbook and ASB. These activities should reflect personal passions and interests.

**Leadership.** All colleges like to admit students who are proven “leaders.” This is because such students have the confidence needed to make a positive contribution to the college to which they are admitted. The best leaders are often the students who get involved because they are passionate about what they are doing. At UHS, there are several opportunities to demonstrate leadership. Students can hold an office position in any of the various clubs on campus, or even found a new club. Off-campus, students can demonstrate leadership by participating in organizations such as local non-profits, groups like Boy Scouts, or any number of other community-oriented organizations.

**Balance.** It is important to balance school-related activities (e.g. clubs, teams, performing groups) and community activities (e.g. volunteering, church activities, participation in community groups) with academics. This demonstrates to colleges that a student’s horizons extend beyond their high school.

## **Which Activities Are Right For Me?**

Now that you know what most colleges are looking for, what does that mean for you? The short answer is . . . it depends. In our opinion, the two most important considerations are: (1) finding activities that you enjoy, and (2) not losing sight of the “big picture.”

**Finding Your “Thing.”** No two students are exactly alike and, as a result, what may be an ideal extra-curricular activity for one student may not be the right choice for another. For example, a student who is fascinated by the biological sciences, and who enjoys interacting with people, would be an ideal volunteer at a local hospital. The same opportunity probably is not the right choice for a student who does not have the same passion for the biological sciences. In our experience, finding your “thing” is an important part of the process because students who truly enjoy what they do are more likely to develop a high level of specialization in a particular activity, and assume a leadership position.

**Don’t Lose Sight of the “Big Picture.”** Even the most gifted 18-year old violinist in California will have dismal chances of getting into Yale University if that student is getting D’s in college preparatory classes. In other words, participation in extra-curricular activities will mean far less if your grades are suffering in the process.

Academics should come first. Don’t get involved in activities simply for the sake of bolstering your resume for college admissions. However, if you have time to participate in extra-curricular activities, be sure to choose those that show your dedication to something other than school work, and you are likely to be well-served.