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College Application Blunders to Avoid

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comes up with a single response to "Why do you want to attend University X?" and uses the response on each college application. This is especially problematic when the student forgets to change the name of the university as he or she cuts and pastes the response into different applications!

4. Grammar and Punctuation: Spelling and grammatical errors show carelessness and and/or poor time management skills. Read your application aloud and proofread it at least twice. This is the right time to ask someone knowledgeable to review your application before you hit the send key.

5. Preparation for Selected Major: Discrepancies between lower grades and higher test scores can be explained (for example, you understand the material you just didn't like doing homework), however, one discrepancy that is hard to rationalize is your selection of major compared against a background that does nothing to confirm interest. You should think about high school as incremental preparation toward higher education. Every course selection and extracurricular activity is chosen to help you learn more about what you do (and don't) want to study in college. If you claim on your application that you have yearned to be a doctor since 1st grade, there should be ample evidence over the intervening years to support your claim.

Colleges are trying to build a balanced community of incoming freshmen and they are actually seeking out evidence of your good qualities on your application. They want reasons to admit you. Take your application seriously and the colleges will take you seriously too.

The fall college application cycle always is accompanied by an abundance of advice from college counselors about common application 'red flags.' In fact there are common mistakes that cause red flags and this article strives to provide an organizational framework for the most frequent culprits. Colleges review application differently, however, there are some basic mistakes that high school students should take pains to avoid.

1. Honesty and Integrity First: Warning signals about character can be extremely damaging. Present your application honestly and authentically, taking care to not exaggerate accomplishments or let someone write or over polish your essay. Did you know that the University of California has a "truth in application" program, which randomly samples a number of applications for verification of extracurricular activities? And regarding essays, if the quality of the essay far exceeds what might be realistically expected from an applicant, the UC can choose to review an applicant's SAT or ACT essay (which is readily available on line) as a crosscheck.

2. Read and Follow Directions: Include all required documents, and stay within the specified word or character count for essays and short responses. Last year, one student told me she wrote six 1500 word essays for a university supplement. The instructions stated that each response should be less than or equal to 1500 characters. The student was wait-listed at a university she was well-qualified to attend. Could that have been the reason? Not surprisingly, the student was far more upset by the time she wasted writing those long essays than by the waitlist offer she received!

3. Shallow and Broad Responses to Supplements: Most admission officers read upwards of 40 applications per day-sometimes more. Many colleges add a unique supplement (a set of unique questions) for the student to answer. The college supplement is your opportunity to prove you can communicate substantive ideas effectively and intelligibly. The more selective the college, the more important it is to seize this chance to convince the college that you are prepared for college-level work. Think about your responses as an interview and give them your best effort. The largest mistake to avoid is the 'one size fits all' approach; this happens when a student

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