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College Advisor

By Elizabeth LaScala



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD, brings decades of admissions expertise to personally guide each student through applying to well-matched colleges, making each step more manageable and less stressful. She has placed hundreds of students in the most prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S. Reach her at (925) 385-0562 (office) or (925) 330-8801 (mobile), or online at www.doingcollege.com or Elizabeth@doingcollege.com.

In October of 2016 President Barrack Obama issued a proclamation deeming November National College Application Month. He might have been dealing with one application firsthand, since his oldest daughter, Malia, was immersed in the process. This year, many seniors are once again working overtime to complete their college applications. One question that they often struggle with is how to approach the "Why our college?" essay.

It is important to understand that every college or university is trying to accomplish at least two things by asking this popular question. First, the college wants to learn if the applicant has done the research necessary to know exactly why he or she is applying to their school. And second, the college wants to determine if the student is a good match for their campus.

In order to make these decisions, they ask questions that will help them to understand what the student knows about the school beyond name recognition. What are the specific factors that appeal? For example, is it the quarter system that permits many courses to be taken, making a dual major more feasible? Or perhaps it is the exploratory curriculum for freshman engineering students, permitting them to determine what area of engineering is best before choosing it as a major. Maybe a prospective applicant is excited by the option to apply to the honors college in the sophomore year, if she is not eligible as an incoming freshman. If the student wants to major in finance, do investment banking companies have a strong presence on campus at the college's career

fairs? If the applicant is uncertain about his path, how easy or hard is it to change majors?

If the prospective student has done sufficient homework, the response to the "Why our college?" essay will reflect that effort and prove that he is truly a great fit for their school.

Here are eight basic tips:

1. Don't talk about location-many colleges are located in great towns and cities, but you are going to college for an education, not to sightsee. So it is best to leave out the "I just love NYC!" type of comment.

Instead, clearly demonstrate the link between what you want to study, your future goals and the school's academic offerings.

2. Don't talk in generalities. Be specific.

3. Do not repeat what the college says on its website. Dig deeper to learn more.

4. If possible, visit the campus before you write your response, or at least do a virtual tour. Write specifics about what you liked when you visited. If you talked to current students, mention something they said that deepened your understanding of the school.

5. Many college representatives travel around the nation to make presentations at college fairs, high schools and other venues during the fall - look for those opportunities under the events tab on the college's website and at your high school's counseling office.

6. Point to some of the programs, research opportunities or projects that excite you. If you have done something similar over the summer or during the school year, explain why you hope to continue and expand that experience in college.

7. Write about more than one area of interest. That could be a club, sport, research opportunity, a study abroad program, volunteer work, an internship or anything else that truly appeals to you.

8. Even if the school is not one of your top picks, you must find valid reasons for applying. No one wants to

feel second best, including colleges, and a lackluster response can result in a rejection letter from a school you considered a 'safe bet.'

Now you are on your way to writing a great essay! Remember, your overall goal is to discover specific details that appeal to you about each school, and then add in your personal experiences to show the connection between the person you are now, and what kind of college student you will be on campus over the next four years.

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