

10 COMMANDMENTS OF THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

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March 3, 2022

There are some key items to think about when you're starting the college admissions process. I've been helping students and families navigate the college admissions process for a long time now and there are some basic fundamental truths.

1. **Ask yourself the tough questions** – For this process to really work, students need to have a better understanding their wants, their likes and very importantly, their dislikes. This isn't just about academics. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 80 percent of students in the United States end up changing their major at least once. On average, college students change their major at least three times over the course of their college career, so knowing thyself is more than identifying a major from a long list of options.

Knowing thyself should go beyond whether the school is dominated by Greek life and has a "ra-ra" sports vibe too. Students should be thinking about their learning styles, accessibility to professors, specialized co-op/internship programs and study abroad opportunities. They should also be thinking about the size of the city/town, access to cultural events, restaurants, etc., as well as climate, distance from home and ease of getting to campus. Take a college major and career assessment as well as a college personality quiz. They will help frame your college list.

2. **Be blind to common stereotypes** – Rankings aren't very meaningful if you're at the bottom of your class at the most prestigious university. A student with a strong GPA, some internship and work experience will always be the preferred hire than a student who didn't perform well at a more name-brand institution.
3. **Visit Colleges** – Like the old line about voting: Early and Often! Start visiting campuses as early as makes sense – If you're on vacation, heading to a wedding, etc. It's important for a student to "trod the sod" and get on campus to check out the kids, the college town, the dorms, the food and most importantly the "vibe." Do they feel like this is a place where they can thrive. I ask students to provide me with specifics about why each school is a good academic fit and a good social fit for them and why it isn't a good fit for them.
4. **Work Hard** – Colleges are more likely to accept and admire a student who worked hard in challenging classes, but didn't necessarily receive straight A's. Colleges are generally less likely to accept students who have strong test scores but a weaker GPA.
5. **Do/Serve/Create** – Colleges definitely want to know that a student has made a contribution to their school and/or their community. The activity list on applications is asking students to share where they've spent their time during high school. And it asks for specifics, how many hours per week and how many weeks per year. The earlier you start keeping track of your club activities, what you're doing in the summer and outside of school, the better off you'll be when it comes time to complete the college applications.

THOU SHALT...

Commandment # 1: Know Thyself: I suggested that a student should spend some time understanding who they are, what they want and where they'd like to be in the future.

Commandment # 2: Don't succumb to prestige. I also cautioned families to do their best not to fall prey to stereotypes and preconceived notions about certain colleges.

Commandment # 3: Visit early and often. I strongly recommended that families begin visiting campuses early in the process and go beyond the standard fare of the information session and a campus tour.

Commandment # 4: Serve your community. I encouraged students to get involved in their community outside of their high school.

Commandment # 5: Challenge thyself. I emphasized that students should take the most rigorous curriculum they can handle at their school.

Commandment # 6: Honor yourself in your essays. Be true to who you are. Write what you care about, not what you think college admissions officers want to read.

Commandment #7: Make your summers count. Do something over the summer that no one else in your high school is doing. Summer activities are one of the best opportunities for a student to set themselves apart. Show colleges what you care about, what's important to you.

Commandment # 8: Demonstrate leadership. Here's the caveat, not everybody is destined to be a leader, but if you have the confidence and people skills, use them. Leadership is the single most transferrable characteristic from high school to college. Follow your passions and get involved in clubs and activities that you really care about, not ones you think will look good on your resume.

Commandment # 9: Create a reasonable list. Don't panic and over-apply. You're better off doing your due-diligence up front; determining why each college needs to stay on your list, having a balanced list with reach schools, target schools and safety schools and knowing you could be happy in a variety of settings.

Commandment # 10: Encourage perspective from everyone. This is targeted at both parents and students. This isn't a life and death scenario. You CAN be happy at a range of schools. That isn't to say you shouldn't have a top choice, but rather, recognize how fortunate you will be to have choices and carry that perspective as you move through the process. This means that families shouldn't over-stress about standardized tests; there are plenty of amazing colleges and universities that are test optional.

Navigating the college admissions process can be stressful, but try to take these "commandments" to heart as you make your way through, because it can also be an incredibly enlightening experience and a wonderful bonding opportunity for parents and children.