

Myths about College Admissions



MYTH 1

If I work hard enough, I will get admitted to the most selective schools

Admission to extremely selective colleges (i.e., Harvard, Stanford and Princeton) is based upon superior effort, achievement, and aptitude. Hard work will indeed result in admission to college but is not the only requirement for those highly, highly selective schools.

MYTH 2

The more 'prestigious' the college, the better; an Ivy League college will guarantee the rich, full and successful life

The most prestigious colleges are not the primarily large research universities where the emphasis is upon research, publishing, consulting, and graduate teaching. At some of these very large universities, up to 70 per cent of the freshman and sophomore teaching can be done by teaching assistants (graduate assistants), many of who have marginal English language skills. Studies show that, at research universities, 90 per cent of the doctoral level faculty taught fewer than the normal teaching load of 12-14 hours per week (60 per cent total teaching less than four hours) with 25 per cent doing no teaching at all.

At liberal arts and sciences colleges only 3 per cent of doctoral faculty do no teaching, with 84 per cent teaching at least three classes a week. If you wish to be taught by a professor with a PhD, and expert in the field, make sure that the faculty at the university you are considering actually teach undergraduates.

MYTH 3

The more selective the college, the better

The degree of selectivity tells more about the popularity of a school than it does about the quality of education. Extremely selective schools are many times known for their graduate programmes rather than undergraduate education or popularity of athletic programmes. Colleges sometimes do not include certain figures in order to appear more selective than they really are. For example, some schools may not include athletes in their reported numbers as they typically do not score as well academically. Better measurements of quality are the percentage of students who graduate, the percentage of students who go on to graduate school, and the attrition (first year retention rate) after the a student's first year.

MYTH 4

High class rank virtually guarantees admission to any Ivy League

In just the U.S. alone, there are some 56,000 valedictorians and salutatorians each year for fewer than 10,000 total openings in the first year classes of just the Ivy League colleges. Keep in mind that all 1,600 Harvard freshmen are not valedictorians.

MYTH 5

Eastern U.S. schools are the best and most desirable; southern schools are the least desirable; and forget about that dreary Siberian plain between Pennsylvania and the Colorado ski slopes known as the Midwest

The Midwest has a 150 year-tradition of quality higher education and many of the recent innovations in higher education have come from this region. Student bodies in many Midwestern schools are more diverse than better known eastern schools. Quality and diversity are distributed institutionally, not geographically. Campuses "eastern-looking" and "ivy covered" are found throughout the Midwest and south.

MYTH 6

SAT scores are the most important thing; good ones will get you in the good college and poor ones will keep you out

Wrong! The most important factors are good grades in a tough programme; 25-33 per cent of the very high-test scorers are not admitted at the very selective schools. The flag of doom is raised on an application with high scores and mediocre or poor grades. When grades are higher than test scores the indication is one of high achievement on the part of the student and this is a plus for admission.

MYTH 7

A SAT prep course will improve your SAT scores

No prep course is going to raise a 400 score to the 600s. A prep course is more likely to increase the math score, but the verbal score is not going to be raised by any quick fix. **A long-term habit of reading is going to have the greatest impact on a score.** Facts show that non-readers seldom have a high verbal score nor do good readers have low verbal scores. The small score increases that can happen with a prep course are not statistically significant.

MYTH 8

Millions of dollars in unused scholarships are untouched

At least 95 per cent of all financial aid is channelled through college financial aid offices. There is, however, a plethora of books on unused scholarship money as well as consultants who, for a fee, will help you find it. Reality is that for international students, the majority of scholarships, merit aid, and need-based financial aid comes directly from the admissions office.

MYTH 9

A college you've heard about is better, or at least safer, than one you have not heard about

Magazine rankings or what your friends say are not good indicators on which to base your decision of which colleges to apply to. Magazine rankings of colleges are so flawed that it would be foolish to risk one's future on their criteria. The name could be familiar for a lot of different reasons other than educational ones: good sports teams, having a lot of money for public relations and recruitment, or simply because a lot of students from your school have gone there in the past. There are plenty of good schools that are not well known but add much more value to your post-grad or employment profile.

And More Myths....

- You must make a definite career decision before entering college
- SAT scores are the most important thing in deciding college admission
- Autobiographical sketches on applications are not important
- Bigger colleges are better than smaller ones
- If you are in the top 10 per cent of your class, you belong in an Ivy League school
- Rejection by the college of your choice is the end of the road
- You do not have to take notes in college
- Grades are not important in college
- Dorms are quiet places (Dozens of teenagers in one place...)

