

for an athletic ability or your grandfather donated the library, everything else comes in a distant third.

Beyond academics, colleges want students who demonstrate a passion—an athletic pursuit or musical accomplishment or devotion to a cause that is near and dear to your heart. Colleges are unimpressed with students who are “a mile wide and an inch deep,” belonging to many clubs but only superficially involved with them.

Also, colleges want to hear your voice in the essay. They don’t want to hear your English teacher’s voice or your mother’s voice—they want the real you to come through.

Wendy Kahn, Wendy Kahn College Consulting, LLC, Highland Park, IL (HECA, IECA Associate Member, NACAC, UCLA Graduate Certificate in College Admissions Consulting): Demonstrate your interest in the school. More than 50% of schools consider an applicant’s “demonstrated interest” when making admissions decisions. Simply put, colleges want students who want them. They don’t want to waste a “fat envelope” on an applicant who probably won’t attend.

One of the best ways to show genuine interest is by making a campus visit. Colleges do understand, though, that sometimes distance makes a visit impossible. Other ways to demonstrate interest include attending a local info session hosted by a college, participating in a college fair, subscribing to a college blog, “friending” a college on Facebook, meeting with an admissions representative who comes to your high school, and/or scheduling a local interview with an alum or admissions staff member. Always follow up any personal contact with a thank you note by either snail mail or e-mail. Refer to one or two topics you discussed and confirm your interest in the school.


In your “Why College X” essay, cite specific educational or extracurricular programs that attract you to the college and reflect on what you believe you might *get* out of attending the school. Next, tell the college what you might *give* to it. In other words, this question isn’t just about why the college is right




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