

Admission Counselors' Take On Applicants and Applications

The following are excerpted from the Johns Hopkins University Director of Admissions blog. He asked his admissions counselors for their ideas on applications.

I approach each application thinking first about how a particular student will contribute to the campus community and then I examine their overall academic abilities and attributes.

I don't like when Mom & Dad complete the application for the applicant. This is my BIGGEST pet peeve.

One favorite essay? After over 1½ decades of reading them? Actually, I do have a favorite. One stands out. It starts with a description of the applicant and a group of his classmates trying to use a pinhole camera, and how this simple invention is really a tool to help us represent the world around us. The essay moves on to make the point that we need invention (like language, and mathematics and the sciences, and even faith) to understand the universe, as "Everything overwhelms us." Provocative ideas are expressed with a real poetry in that essay, too.

It drives me crazy when applicants forget that the JHU essay question asks about an adventure they'd plan, not how to spend \$10 in a day. The question is not about how to spend a free day or how to get through 24 hours with only \$10. The question is about going on an adventure.

Here's just a sample of few of my pet peeves: (1) Applicants who submit their application with one name, their test scores with a different name, and their transcript or recs with another arrangement of their name. (2) Spending \$10 to go to the beach or hiking and forgetting that it is supposed to be an ADVENTURE. (3) Also with the essay, spending \$10 on gas or starting one's essay with a phrase such as "\$10 does not go a long way in today's society." (4) Admissions stalkers -- you know who you are. Email us with questions, not just to say "hi." (5) Applicants who have their Mom or Dad make all of their phone calls or write all of their emails for them.

I tend to begin with the personal side of the application starting with the essay, the resume, and the recommendations. I look for students who have something to say. I look for students who are leaders and progressive thinkers. I like to review an application and gather a sense of: "I can't wait to see what this student is going to accomplish here at Hopkins and years to come!" From there I see if their academic success mirrors their personal success.

Every applicant is smart. Every applicant boasts a pristine transcript coupled with countless community service hours and an extensive resume of leadership positions. For me, the most difficult part of reviewing an application is trying to distinguish what makes a student unique. What qualities does this individual have that will really help him or her succeed in this community? Will he or she make a sincere impact here at Hopkins both inside and outside the classroom? Every applicant can succeed in one dimension, but I think the students that are truly well-rounded are harder to find on paper.

I don't appreciate it when activities both inside and outside the classroom aren't thoroughly explained. You might spend most of your free time involved with Key Club or NHS, but if you don't let me know what that particular organization is all about, I don't really know what you've been up to. Likewise, there's a big difference between having played on the tennis team in high school and having been the Most Improved Player in tenth grade, Most Valuable Player in eleventh grade, Captain and District Champ in twelfth grade. Don't be afraid to brag about your accomplishments and don't be afraid to attach a separate resume. I'm able to paint a better picture of an applicant the more you give me to work with.

I look for signs of curiosity from the applicant. I love reading about what drives someone's interest and/or why they feel the university can help in their quest of higher learning. In the end, I have an affinity for someone who wants more than the prestige that comes from attending a top-tier university.

I don't like when I see letters of support that have Johns Hopkins spelled incorrectly.

I don't like grammatical or usage errors in an essay although I am quite forgiving in most cases. The kids are just 17!!!

What does your college application mean?

Your college application is the first and probably the last “look” that college will have at you – they will decide on your admission based on it. What kind of impression do you want to leave with them?

What are they looking for beyond strength of curriculum, grades, GPA, and test scores?

Colleges are looking closely at how you will contribute to their campuses. This might seem daunting, but when you review what you’ve accomplished in high school, when you write carefully and completely about your high school experiences, the answer will begin to form itself.

- You are taking a very difficult high school curriculum;
- You are involved in school activities;
- You are involved in community activities
- You can manage your time being able to take a difficult curriculum and still be involved in activities;
- You can write clearly about this;
- You take great care in completing your application;
 - o What are they going to think about you if you write your essay the night before, don’t do spell check, don’t show it to a teacher, just hand it in, first draft? They are going to think that this is the way you will be doing work at college – your work at college will be careless like your application – they don’t want careless students, therefore, they won’t accept you. They want students who care about their work, who care about how they present themselves, who have attention to detail, and who have pride in their work. If you don’t demonstrate pride in your work, then you probably won’t get it in college.