

Blended Learning: Understanding the College Process

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Introduction

In this society, we are seeing more students applying for college than ever before. They are utilizing all the technology and techniques that are being taught to them in their classrooms. According to a report by Forbes Newsletter, total college applications in the US increased by 30% from 2020-2023. Also, for the year 2023, more students applied through Common App which is an app that is provided to students where they can apply for college (Nietzel, M. T. (n.d.)). Not all Universities have adopted this app, but this further proves that technology is becoming a vital learning tool in our society today when it applies to college applications. Technology in this age needs to be utilized to its fullest potential for students to learn and adapt to the always changing world. This literature review will explore the benefits of knowing the right information, becoming educated on college applications and how informative online platforms are necessary for students to learn.

The Common Misconceptions of the College Application World

There are many misconceptions when it comes to college applications. According to U.S. News, a common misconception is that test scores can make or break your chances of getting in. Christiansen says, "There are many students we've denied with perfect test scores because they didn't have anything else to set them apart"(Colino, 2021). Colleges and Universities are looking for applicants who will strengthen their university both academically and socially. Many of them have now become test-optional, meaning they do not require the

SAT or ACT scores because they recognize that many applicants have intellectual and academic abilities not reflected in test scores. An important thing that students overlook is social media. Can it be used against you? Yes, it can. According to KD College Prep, “Admissions officers sort through thousands of applications. When they have a pool of candidates who share similar GPAs and extracurriculars, the admissions reps may go on social media to see what sets them apart from one another” (Brehe, 2023). One big misconception I see often is that college admissions need to start in your senior year. That is not true at all. According to KD College Prep(KD), “if you wait until your senior year to start planning for college admissions, then you are already running late. It is better to begin in your junior year or, at the very latest, during the summer before your senior year. Hundreds of high school students make that mistake every year, and many Universities require fall deadlines for their applications when it takes about a year to do all the research you need to be successful in their programs” (Brehe, 2023).

Application Submission

There are three distinct types of admissions. Rolling admissions, early decision and early action, and regular decision. Rolling admissions is when Universities or Colleges send out acceptance letters throughout their enrollment process in the order that they receive them. According to Harberson, you will want to submit your application as soon as you can in your senior year. “The sooner you get your application in, the better chance you have of being admitted. These colleges have plenty of room in the first-year class in the fall. But as the year goes on and spaces are filled, it will get harder to be admitted” (Harberson, 2020). Then there is early decision/early action which means according to Harberson, “with more requirements to the

application than most Rolling Admissions colleges, it can take several weeks for all of the pieces of the application to be received and processed from the testing organizations (if official test scores are required), high school, and letter writers” (Harberson, 2020). So, submitting your application before the deadline for early admissions is a wonderful thing to do but it does not necessarily mean your application is going to get read sooner. Then there is the regular decision process. According to Harberson, “at almost every college, admissions officers are not going to start reading Regular Decision applications until they finish reading and making decisions on the Early Decision or Early Action cases” (Harberson, 2020). However, submitting applications way before the deadline will give high school students the peace of mind that they need to succeed in the college admissions process and take some of the pressure off. Of course, they still have a lot of things they need to do along the way, but they can feel relieved once they get their college applications in.

Achievements to Include

Certain colleges are looking for specific achievements to make students stand out in the college application process. According to the College Essay team the number 1 achievement colleges and Universities are looking for is Commitment (2023). Showing commitment means following through on applications and engaging with academics and extracurriculars in deep lasting ways. This could be the decision maker for your college acceptance so staying committed to a goal is important. According to Muniz(Muniz, 2019), college applications also include showing off to the admissions committee. That could include Achievements, Honors Awards, Scholarship, Membership or a Diploma of some kind. Muniz defines Achievements as “an academic honor or award is any major achievement you’ve made and been recognized for in some way”(Muniz, 2019).

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty on a college application is very important. Colleges have a way of finding out if you were dishonest on any part of your application when it comes to academics. Lone Star College (LSC) defines Academic Honesty as “engaging in any of the acts in the preceding sentence with the intent to deceive an instructor or third party in assessing an individual’s academic mastery of an academic component, assignment, area, subject, course, class, or program (LSC 2017).” Fabricating pieces of your application can result in a denial from the University you want to get into and it will go on your permanent record with them meaning when you apply to them in the future, you might not be able to get in. It is never ok to falsify your college application no matter the situation. It is the worst thing you can do in the college admissions process because if you are caught, you will be discredited by the Universities you are trying to apply for. That also includes having your parents do your essay for you.

Do’s and Don’ts for College Essays

According to Speransky (2022), what not to do when writing your essays is do not try to write something that you think colleges will like. The application committee can tell when a college application is made up or overly calculated(Speransky, 2022). Try to avoid making up a story and write about something that happened to you in the past. Another important thing in your essay is to make it sound like yourself. According to Musico(n.d.), “Admissions officers get a sense of your qualifications by looking at the paper side of your application. They get a sense of the person behind those qualifications by looking at the human side of your application.

Use the essay to your advantage to show colleges the type of person they'd be getting on campus if they accept you.”

Online Platforms to Utilize

The road to college always starts with applications. The entire process can be confusing so we need to create online platforms where students can go to learn about admissions. Oreopoulos and Ford (Oreopoulos & Ford, 2019) created an experiment involving workshops. They chose schools with the lowest transition rate to college. They called it the LifeAfterHighSchool program which included 3 workshops.” A key tool used in the workshops was the LifeAfterHighSchool website, which was designed to provide students with a "one-stop-shop" with directed access to application websites, informational videos, tools for identifying suitable programs for every different student, and a financial aid and budget calculator” (Oreopoulos & Ford, 2019). They created a workshop that would help with college applications and the result was a success. They concluded that “Program applications increased 29 percentage points and college enrollment 6 percentage points”(Oreopoulos & Ford, 2019). Utilizing an online platform was very helpful for the students and there needs to be more out there that they can use.

Race and Class Variation

There are many factors in research about online programs to help students that have not kept up with the race and class variations. According to Holland (Holland, 2014), “until recently much of the research on college choice gave little attention to the actual steps of college application and did not always attend to variations by race and class.” We constantly do research on college applications but we always leave something out of the process. According to Black, Cortes and Lincove (Black et al., 2020), “The gap between Hispanic and white students in

college application is consistent across levels of observable college readiness and high school quality. Even when Hispanic students attend high schools where a majority of students move on to college or where Hispanic students are statistically highly likely to achieve automatic admissions, Hispanic students are significantly less likely to apply to college than white students.” In order to create a blended learning environment for our students we need to factor in everything that we know about high school students so we can best help them as much as they need.

Conclusion

The need for online platforms to guide students is well needed in this ever changing society. According to Awuor(Awuor, 2024), “As the digital era continues to evolve, so too will the ways in which students engage with and navigate the college application journey”. Students have an abundance of resources to help them through college applications and there is always room for more online platforms and resources that help students. Creating an online blended learning platform is the key to college applications. This paper explained the benefits of knowing the right information, becoming educated on college applications and how informative online platforms are necessary for students to learn.

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