

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT COLLEGE:

1. It is better to get good grades than to take challenging courses.

Success, even modest, in advanced (honors) or accelerated courses (AP, IB, dual enrollment) indicates to a college that a student seeks and can handle challenging courses – similar to the courses that students will take in college. A challenging college preparatory program (taking core classes that are advanced or accelerated) will help a student gain admission to more selective colleges.

2. Standardized test scores (PSAT, ACT Aspire, AP, ACT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests) are more important than high school grades.

A student's performance in high school (taking the most rigorous schedule possible) is a better predictor of college success than the standardized test. But, that does not mean that colleges won't look at a student's SAT or ACT scores. Most public colleges and universities as well as private schools that have far more applicants than spaces will use standardized test scores to determine eligibility.

3. The "interview" is a key component of the college admission process.

Interviews, if granted, are an essential part of the admission process. But, it won't make up for a lackluster performance in high school.

4. The college process begins in 12th grade.

The college journey begins during the summer prior to 9th grade and continues until the end of high school (12th grade). For purposes of the college application, the college process concludes at the end of the 11th grade summer. Grades, test scores, extracurricular activities and community service hours earned up to this point are what are recorded on the student's college application.

5. If a student did poorly in 9th or 10th grade(s), he/she will not get into a selective college.

All colleges look for improvement in performance during the high school years. This is a sign that the student can and will do the work. Showing vast improvement in the junior and senior years of high school shows a college that the student has settled down and has become more serious when considering his/her future. On the other hand, do NOT expect to catch up for three poor years and show improvement in one good semester as a senior.

6. Participating in many extra-curricular activities will compensate for poor grades.

Colleges do consider extracurricular activities (athletics, the arts, student government, honor societies, special interest clubs, and community services) when reviewing applications. But, colleges look at academic performance first. Extracurricular activities help only if the college believes that the student can do

the work. Students need to manage their time so that their academic performance is balanced with their extracurricular activities. A student should choose activities that showcase a depth and level of expertise over time rather than being a “jack of all trades.”

7. A high school student only needs to take the minimum amount of college preparatory courses to get into college.

Technically this is true – but in reality it is not. The more “core” classes that a student takes, the better the chances for gaining college admission into a selective four-year college.

8. A student should only complete 100 hours of community service over four years of high school (the amount of hours necessary for a Florida Bright Futures Academic Scholarship).

Community service can help a student stand apart from other college applicants. Multiple hours (100 to 1,000) may not only help a student become admitted to college, but will also help when applying for college-based and independent scholarships. Dedicating time to public service (giving back) not only has tangible benefits, but will also give the student a deeper understanding of community and national issues.

9. A student should have the high school teachers who gave him/her an “A” write the letters of recommendation.

A student should ask the teachers who knows him/her the best to write the letters of recommendation. This could be a teacher who taught the student over several years, or was both a teacher and a sponsor of a club/activity/sport in which the student participated.

10. Admission committees cannot tell if the applicant wrote their own essay.

Admissions staff read thousands of essays each year and CAN tell if the student had a “ghost writer” or received excessive assistance. In selective universities, admissions staff will compare the student’s application essay to the one that was written as part of his/her SAT and/or ACT entrance exam. A student must write his/her own essay and it should reflect on a student’s abilities and interests as well as what they can offer their university’s community.

11. A student should determine his/her major or career before choosing a college.

College is a time for exploration. There are very few cases where a student must choose a major and remain in that major after the college application process is complete. Most students declare their major during their sophomore year. Over 70% of college freshman will change their major at least one time during their freshman/sophomore year. Students who are “undecided” should take their time;

take electives or core requirements that allow the student to explore new fields and take pre-requisite requirements. Students should also consider colleges/universities that have good advising in both academic and career planning.

12. Not knowing or hearing about a college must mean it's not very good.

With more than 1,700 community colleges and 2,700 four-year colleges (all degree-granting) in the United States, it is impossible to know each of them and what they have to offer. Students should judge a college/university on their merits, not name recognition.

13. A student should attend the most prestigious college to which they have been admitted.

A student should attend the college that "fits" the best – if it happens to be prestigious – that's great. Fit is how a student feels when he/she is on campus, if the college has the major that the student is considering, if the college matches how the student learns and how they teach (large lecture hall, small round-table discussions, virtual classes), and if the student can handle the academic pressures of the college.

14. The best time to visit a college is after a student is admitted.

Many students find out (when it is too late) that none of the colleges to which they applied and were admitted "felt right" when they finally visited. Try to schedule college visits before applying – either during a college's summer sessions or over a long weekend during the school year. A picture is worth a thousand words. If possible, after a student has been admitted, visit the college again. The student will now see the school in a different light – one that will be his/her home over the next 4-6 years.

15. College takes place over four years.

Approximately one in five students complete college in four years. Only two in five students complete college in six years. A student should research a college's graduate rate and consider how many courses are given online (virtually) vs. a class being held in a real classroom with a real professor. Changing majors may also delay a student from graduating within a four-year period of time. Additional classes may need to be taken due to a change of major that will result in the student graduating later than expected. Students should expect to attend at least one summer session.

16. Liberal arts colleges do not have good science programs.

The “liberal” in liberal arts means “broadening or freeing” (as in freeing one’s mind from narrow thinking) – and the term liberal arts actually refers to “liberal arts and sciences.” Most liberal arts colleges emphasize science and have been doing so, in some cases, for more than 100 years.

17. Residence halls (dorms) are simply a place to sleep.

Many colleges consider their dorms to be “residential colleges” – a place where students can take advantage of a 24-hour learning experience. Residence halls have regular activities with some focusing on wellness and personal growth to special interests. Taking part in residential life can dramatically add to a student’s college experience.

18. There is no difference between colleges and universities.

Colleges are generally smaller and universities are larger – but more significantly – colleges are made up of academic departments while universities are made up of colleges (schools that are separate entities). If a student attends a college, he/she may choose to major in the business department; while a student in a university will major in the Business College within the university. There are exceptions to the rule – some colleges (Boston College – 9,200 undergraduates/5,000 graduate students in Chestnut Hill, MA) are very similar to a university while some universities (Depauw University – 2,400 students in Greencastle, IN) are more similar to a college. Colleges can grow into universities.