

College Beat

Colleges and Extracurricular Activities

By
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As a college consultant, or IEC (Independent Educational Consultant), people often ask me questions revolving around the activities of high school students. “What activities do colleges like to see on an applicant’s activities resume?” Or, “Is it true that it would be better for Johnny to play the tuba than to play soccer because tuba players are more unique?”

I can’t emphasize enough that the thinking behind these questions is flawed. Pursuing an activity because you think it will win over an admissions officer is taking the wrong approach. Here is my take on the subject of activities: colleges do indeed care very much about the activities that an applicant has been involved in, but one activity should not be viewed as a superior choice over another. College admissions officers are looking for students who have a passion for *something*. The thinking is that if a student is truly passionate about an activity s/he will most likely want to pursue that passion in college. If she’s been playing soccer for years she will probably want to join a soccer team in college (perhaps an intramural team) or, if he’s been playing the tuba for years perhaps he will sign up for the college pep band. The more involved students that a college has in their student body, the more vibrant and interesting their campus becomes.

So what does this mean for you (or your son/ daughter) trying to decide what extracurriculars to get involved in? It means go do what you love to do! If you love to do something, you will keep on doing it – this is what will win over the admissions officers. Consistency, or “stick-to-it-ness” is good. It would be better to play the trumpet for six years than to dabble in eight different activities in that timeframe. Build around the things you love to do as well. For example, if you love to play basketball but feel like you need some leadership experience, try your hand at coaching a recreational youth basketball team. Use your passion as a spring board for other types of things – at least you know you will have an interest in the subject matter and you have set yourself up to do something you enjoy.

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