

# College Beat

## **Top-Ten List** By Nancy Federspiel

This summer, IECA (Independent Educational Consultants Association) released its updated version of the “Top Ten Strengths and Experiences Colleges look for in High School Students”. This is based on a survey conducted of the organization’s professional member consultants. The results published this summer have changed in a few interesting ways since the last publication of the top-ten list in 2007.

Unlike David Letterman, I am going to cut to the chase and start with the number one item on the list. The most important thing is the degree of rigor the student chooses in her high school curriculum (accelerated, honors or AP courses). This, along with the other top two items, has held its position on the list from 2007 to 2010. Item number two is still the student’s grades in the context of the rigorous curriculum. And, item number three is still standardized test scores that are consistent with high school performance. IECA members agree that stellar test scores alone cannot secure admission to competitive schools, but poor scores can indeed still be an obstacle for students seeking admission to the top schools that require submission of test scores.

One change to the list that I happen to agree with whole-heartedly is the rise in the importance of the college admission essay. With the rise of competition in the admissions arena comes an increase in the importance of the “soft side” of the applicant’s file. A well-written essay that is revealing about a student’s personality can be the deciding factor for admissions officers among students with similar academic records. Time spent on developing a solid essay is indeed well spent.

One item on the top ten list that may come as a surprise to some families is the appearance of “demonstrated enthusiasm to attend”. Admissions offices are more concerned than ever about their yield (the ratio of accepted students to those who actually decide to attend). The college rankings game, the concept of “enrollment management” in terms of hitting the exact target numbers and the increases in the number of applications submitted per student have made this new phenomenon in the admissions world very important. Colleges keep track of a student’s participation in things like campus visits, information sessions and interviews as a means of measuring the students “perceived level of interest” and it becomes a part of the admission decision. They want to admit students that they think will actually attend.

Another item that may come as a surprise to some is item #4. It reads, “Passionate involvement in a few activities, demonstrating leadership and initiative. Depth, not

breadth of experience is most important.” The student doesn’t have to do “everything”. He just has to really care about the things in which he is involved.

People often ask me what colleges are *really* looking for in high school students. It is a good question with important answers. If you would like to see the top ten list in its entirety, please visit [www.ccs4college.com](http://www.ccs4college.com) . You will find the Top-Ten list on our homepage.

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