

“Mythsconceptions” about College Admissions

MYTH #1 A “university” is better than a “college”

First, we should define university and college. In the United States these terms are often used interchangeably when referring to tertiary education. College is not to be confused with what is often referred to overseas as a secondary school.

College: An institution of higher learning that offers undergraduate programs, usually of a four-year duration, that lead to the bachelor's degree in the arts or sciences (B.A. or B.S.). The term "college" is also used in a general sense to refer to a postsecondary institution. A college may also be a part of the organizational structure of a university.

University: An educational institution that usually maintains one or more four-year undergraduate colleges (or schools) with programs leading to a bachelor's degree, a graduate school of arts and sciences awarding master's degrees and doctorates (Ph.D.s), and graduate professional schools.

These definitions do not say that a university is better than a college but rather that they are different from each other. *College* will usually refer to a two or four year, undergraduate institution while *university* refers to an institution with graduate programs. However, please note that this is not a hard and fast rule. For example, Boston College, also has excellent graduate schools and programs and Dartmouth College is a university.

MYTH #2 Students rarely get into their first choice school.

According to a freshmen survey done in 2007 by CIRP at ULCA, 80% of first year students are admitted to their top-choice school in the US.

MYTH #3 If I am an undergraduate student at a certain university, it will increase my chance of being accepted to their graduate school

On the contrary, most graduate programs do not want their own students. They prefer to increase the academic diversity of the program by accepting students from other institutions. Also, undergraduate students should attend a different school for graduate study to provide them with a new and expanded experience in their field of study and exposure to different faculty members.

MYTH #4 The SAT is an intelligence test

The SAT measures the critical thinking skills students need for academic success in college. The SAT is a reasoning test, meaning that it measures how well students analyze and solve problems. These are skills students learn in high school that are needed in college.

MYTH # 5 The SAT is better than the ACT

These standardized tests measure different things. The ACT is an achievement test based on a student's general development in the areas of English, math, reading and science at the secondary level. The SAT is a reasoning test or a general thinking test. Traditionally the ACT has been preferred in the Midwest where it started and the SAT on the East and West coast. One should always check the web sites of the individual schools one is applying to before deciding which test to take. Primarily, a student should consider which test suits their learning profile. Overseas the SAT is more prevalent. At some elite international schools, students are now taking both tests in an attempt to enhance their acceptances.

Myth #6 Admission test scores are the most important factor in an application

Grades in college preparatory courses, strength of curriculum, admission test scores, and overall grades are the most important factors in admission decisions. More than half of all colleges and universities rated these combined factors as "considerably important."(NACAC 2009)

MYTH #7 It is easy to transfer from one 4 year program to another

While some students have done this quite successfully, the majority find several obstacles in their path. The easiest way to enter a school is to be accepted as a freshman. Most colleges and universities use transfer applicants to fill vacancies after the first year attrition. This is a small number so your opportunities are limited. You need to do extensive and individual research before you consider this option.

MYTH #8 I need to major in biology or chemistry to go to medical school

In the US and Canada, one applies to medical school after receiving a bachelors' degree and taking a test called the MCAT. In today's world, "non-science majors are actually accepted at a slightly higher rate than science majors." (Private Colleges & Universities "2005 Health & Medicine Ed. P. 15) Medical schools want you to take a variety of courses. Don't major in science unless you absolutely love it. It alone will not enhance your medical school application. Medical schools are trying to diversify their pools and welcome students with a strong liberal arts background.

MYTH #9 In order to be safe and/or happy, I must attend school in the same city or state as a family member

Being close to family is something to consider. While it's a good reason to select a certain state or school, the school that is closest to your relatives may not be the best school for YOU. The proven reality is that the school becomes your new environment and the college community becomes your "family". With excellent transportation and communications one is never too far away from anyone. Don't limit your options by insisting that you live near a relative you may have never met before and may rarely visit.

MYTH #10 Liberal arts means that a student is undecided and a liberal arts education doesn't prepare you for anything

The liberal arts provide a solid academic background for any future study. Such a program allows the student to explore many subjects and the connections between them. Today's graduates need to be able to respond to change, to be flexible, responsible, and self-reliant. They must be able to communicate and have transferable skills. A liberal arts education is based on that philosophy.

Liberal arts (or "liberal arts and sciences," or "arts and sciences"): A term referring to academic studies of subjects in the humanities (language, literature, philosophy, the arts), the social sciences (economics, sociology, anthropology, history, political science), and the physical sciences (mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry).

Alamuddin, March 2013