



Why and How to Demonstrate Interest to Colleges

Why?

Feeling pressure to raise their position in numerous published rankings, a majority of colleges and universities have admissions policies designed to do just that. Deans of Enrollment Management are charged with increasing the size of the applicant pool while decreasing the number of applicants they must admit in order to fill each freshman class. A larger applicant pool coupled with a higher yield (percent of admitted students who actually enroll) makes a school look more selective, and consequently more desirable.

When schools send you unsolicited invitations to apply, even if they include an application fee waiver, don't be fooled into thinking it means they really want you and would probably admit you if you did apply. These invitations are almost always part of a cynical strategy to drive up the number of applicants so the schools can turn down more of them. In this unfortunate environment, it is essential that the applicants be strategic themselves and do everything they can to convince the admissions folks everywhere they're applying to that if accepted, they would actually enroll in that school.

Where?

At some large state schools like Penn State and the University of Maryland, admissions decisions are based almost exclusively on quantitative factors like GPA and test scores with no consideration given to an applicant's demonstration of interest in the school. However, almost all smaller schools and even some larger ones (the University of Michigan, for instance) acknowledge that applicants' level of interest plays some role in admissions decisions. Schools rank it in their self-reported data on a scale from "very important" (at American University, for instance) to "considered" at University of Massachusetts and University of Virginia.

The Traditional Ways

In general, if the student lives within a 4-hour drive of the school, he or she will be expected to visit, sign in at the admissions office and sit in on an information session and/or take a student-led tour. In addition to visiting (or instead, if the school is too far away and expensive to get to), students can try to connect with an admissions officer at a local college fair, and if a representative from the college comes to speak at the student's high school, the student should not only attend, but introduce him

or herself and, if possible chat briefly about the school's virtues. If you miss the high school presentation for some reason, you can email the representative later and explain that you're very interested in the school for various reasons and regret having missed the chance to meet in person.

Applicants can also check the college's website or telephone the admissions office to find out if anyone will be giving presentations and/or interviewing students in local public places. Syracuse University offers a variety of informational programs as well as interviews in Lubin House, a building they own in midtown Manhattan. Indiana University offers informational sessions in hotels, and many admissions officers from smaller schools schedule meetings with students at places like Starbucks.

The New Ways

Word is out that some colleges are now collecting data electronically to predict applicants' level of interest, and among the things they look at is who "likes" the school on Facebook and follows it there. Even sneakier, schools sometimes send emails with attachments and keep track of who clicks to open the attachments and who doesn't. The message is clear, if you don't want to have your application summarily discarded, you'd better read your email and click on everything a college sends you.

Good news if you want every school to think you love them most:

The ACT has announced that not all the colleges you send them to will be able to see where else you're sending them, as was previously reported. A list of other recipients will be visible only when students arrange to have their scores sent prior to the test administration. That's one more reason to wait until you receive the scores yourself before paying to send them to any of your schools.