

PROJECT SUMMER: Building Blocks for a Successful College Application

***By Robert Pertusati
Associate Dean
Director of Recruitment
Undergraduate Admissions
Stony Brook University***

Demographics indicate that the number of students applying to college during the next several years will continue to increase. This trend directly impacts the level of competition you as a student will face as you navigate the college admissions process. Constructing an impressive college application is critical in today's competitive admissions environment. Much like developing an eye-catching employment resume, you must set yourself apart by carefully packaging your talents and accomplishments in a way that will catch the attention of savvy college admission officers who review and render decisions on thousands of college applications.

While academic credentials and college entrance exams continue to play important roles in determining "fit" between student and college, there is increased attention paid to those unique activities you involve yourself in beyond the classroom. With today's demanding schedules and obligations, you may often find it difficult to juggle your studies and co-curriculars during the traditional academic year. As a result, you will seek special opportunities available during summer months.

Academic opportunities available to you include enrolling in classes and participating in summer research programs on college campuses. Not only does this provide access to intellectually stimulating experiences, but it engages you in culturally rich exchanges with college students and faculty. Earning college credit during the summer may be applied to your academic record at institutions across the nation and demonstrate your interest and ability to master challenges. Research programs encourage you to actively participate in the learning process by asking questions such as "*why*" and "*under what circumstances does this hold true*" as you test the accuracy and validity of information in which they are presented. During college planning presentations, I regularly ask high school students if they *accept* or *question* information that teachers present them in class. Their responses are generally mixed, however, I encourage them to question that information. Learning should be active, not passive.

Many students seek opportunities to study abroad in countries across the globe. Not only does this provide insight into other cultures, but also allows you to put to good use your language skills acquired in high school foreign language classes. These experiences are both academically enriching and a great deal of fun. Group tours are the most popular as they are well organized and structured. In many cases, you may take formal classes in academic institutions within these countries, or simply participate in cultural experiences that will expand your intellectual curiosities.

There are many opportunities other than academics available to you during the summer months that will enhance your college applications as well as provide you with life-long learning. These include volunteerism and community service. Colleges today are placing great emphasis on how students give back to their communities. Not only does this demonstrate commitment to a cause and concern with helping others, but it also implies that students will continue to be active participants in their new college campus communities. In reviewing thousands of college applications each year and in interviewing hundreds of prospective students, I often learn of so many incredible examples of how students support their communities. These include: participating in hurricane relief efforts at the site of the disaster, staffing food shelters, participating in literacy programs for both children and adults, as well as playing leadership roles in local houses of worship. Many other students serve as mentors to younger children in numerous community-based programs. Volunteerism in community service speaks to your character, leadership and integrity...all key elements of successful college bound students.

Now that you have availed yourself of these dynamic opportunities, what's next? It is important that you be prepared to discuss these experiences with admissions officers during college interviews. We enjoy being engaged in conversations with you and want you to share with us your passions...*what makes you unique*. Tell us what you've learned from these summer experiences and how they have impacted you. Very often your college essay will be another vehicle through which you can describe to us the depth and impact of your summer journey. Be creative, be direct, be sincere! Don't tell us what you think we want to hear, but rather what it is you truly have to say. After all, we are "people people" not the "gate keepers" we are often accused of being. We enjoy learning of your journeys both in and beyond the classroom and are sincerely committed to helping you find the right "fit" in the college admissions process. Seek out those opportunities that match your interests and goals and you will find that the key to your college success begins with self-discovery and active participation. Enjoy the journey!