

COLLEGE BOUND

Prepare for college during summer



SONJA
MONTIEL

High school students have recently completed another academic year, and it must feel great to have a moment of relaxation. However, while summer's arrival means students eagerly welcoming a rest period to "just be," it is also important that they have some sort of plan to fill up the summer months.

In the college admissions process, universities and colleges are taking a closer look at what students do in the summertime. As you can imagine, a student committed to academic and/or extracurricular activities will be significantly valued toward an admission decision. Students who get involved during a time period when they don't have to be reveals a quality of motivation and, more importantly, initiative to do something they like.

While it is emphasized that students take the time to rest after working hard during their academic year, it must also be emphasized that students have a plan for summer. Not only will doing something add to college applications but also that something may be one step toward discovering an interest and passion that students never thought of before (or have always dreamed of). Consider the following list of things students may be filling their summer with. This list is not all-inclusive. Many students combine their involvement, and some may just create something unique and innovative that fits their own tastes (which is adored by college admissions offices).

Travel at home or abroad

Whether you are traveling with your family on vacation or participating in an abroad program, the experience can have a significant impact to college admission. It's important to embrace your time interacting with the country you are visiting by reflecting on how the experience impacted you. Maybe there was an event that changed the way you think about things, someone from another culture who challenged your beliefs, or interactions that taught you a lesson. When you apply for college, these experiences could be the beginning of a college essay. If you are interested in abroad programs, you can contact the Council on International Educational Exchange at 1-800-448-9944 or the American Field Service Intercultural Programs at 1-800-237-4636.

Volunteer

Students staying home for the summer may have an interest in helping organizations in their communities. This option is valued just as much as traveling or any other extracurricular activity. However, the most important thing when pursuing a volunteer commitment is that you have to like it. There are many students who choose to volunteer simply because they think it adds to their college applications. As a result, their commitment is short-lived, which can hurt their applications rather than help them. If students don't get involved with activities they genuinely enjoy, college representatives scrutinize and de-emphasize the involvement. If you decide to volunteer this summer, committing from 10 to 15 hours per week for the entire summer shows colleges that you are motivated and dedicated to the cause. For ideas, visit <http://www.volunteermatch.org> or <http://www.teenink.com>.

Seek work and internships

There are many students who work because they have to or because they want to. Either way, work is highly valued when colleges review experiences outside the classroom. The fact that students are earning money to help out with family expenses, support their own expenses and/or save for college says a lot about the maturity of the applicants. If you work, choose a job that you will enjoy or one that matches your career goals. With internships, students are showing colleges that they are serious about pursuing their educational and career goals. Whether working or committed to an internship, it's expected that you will be putting in from 30 to 40 hours per week throughout the summer (if working is all you are doing).

Pre-college programs an option

There are some students who apply and are accepted to pre-college programs at four-year colleges and universities across the country. These exciting programs are usually from one to six weeks during which students live in the resident halls and attend college courses with other high school students from all over the country. Some programs specialize in specific areas such as the arts, engineering, math and science, creative writing, journalism, and the list goes on. Most colleges have some sort of high school summer program. You can either visit the Web site of a particular college that you are interested in or visit <http://www.teenink.com> for ideas. Also, if finances are limited in your household, these programs have financial aid packages available.

Keep up sports involvement

You athletes probably have no other choice but to train and attend summer tournaments. Keep it up. Athletes who are serious about their sports can have a big impact in the application process. The level of commitment during the off-season reveals a strong sense of passion, commitment and drive to be a more improved player. To colleges, this can be interpreted as a drive to be a better student inside and outside the classroom. Keep in mind that being recruited to top college athletic programs is very competitive, and for most high school athletes, a full scholarship will probably not happen. However, the mere fact that students have dedicated themselves to sports from three to four years, consistently improving their skills, says a lot about their character and potential as college students. So students, what are your plans for the remainder of the summer?

— Sonja Montiel, M.A., is the founder of *College Confidence*, <http://www.collegeconfidence.com>, and holds monthly workshops on college planning. She also is the author of *The College Road Trip, Your Admissions Planner* available on the site. Montiel writes a monthly column for *Ventura County Star* and is on the executive board of the Western Association of College Admissions Counseling. For more information call (805) 407-7023 or visit <http://www.collegeconfidence.com>.