

The Spiritual Qualities of Excellence

The ways in which you excel embody your personal sense of who you are, in relation to yourself and to others. You excel in ways in which no one else can. Your interests guide your choice of activities, and your personal convictions and qualities inspire and enrich your performance. No book can tell you how or in what to excel—but we *can* help you identify and emphasize your particular areas of excellence. And we urge you, above all, to listen to your own inner voice that inspires your unique capabilities, be they athletic, artistic, intellectual, political, social, or charitable. We have heard again and again from admissions committees that they look for students with a passionate commitment to one or a couple of interests, not for candidates who have many minor activities without a deeply held conviction about any of them. Pursue your passions.

In working with thousands of students, we have observed (and admissions officers confirm this) that those who excel at any activity exhibit four qualities. If you recognize these traits in yourself, you can be sure that selective colleges will spot them, too.

A willingness to compete with yourself as well as with others. You ask more of yourself, striving to better your own performance. You wrestle with the devil in you that would persuade you to take it easy. You have balance in your life, but you push yourself and test your perceived limits.

A positive outlook on life, with less tendency than others have to use drugs and alcohol. A jovial, extroverted manner does not necessarily reflect a positive outlook. You may be the strong, silent type. Your positive outlook embodies a healthy optimism and a confidence that reassures those around you. Your competitive spirit inspires even your opponents, who trust your honest striving. You rely for stimulus on your innate optimism, rather than on substances.

Good organization in use of time and study habits. You have learned that there is time for everything as long as you are aware of what must be done. You do the important things first, and the trivial things take care of themselves instead of eating into your study hour. You get enough sleep, you have added energy as a result, and you get things done more efficiently.

A concern for others, which often earns you the role of leader. You have been praised for your personal qualities at home and in school, and so you respond warmly and genuinely to others. Your self-confidence and capability inspire people to have confidence in you and to seek you out to fill leadership roles.

Nonacademic Excellence as an Admissions Factor: Commitment, Development, and Recognition

Selective colleges seek real students, of course, not paragons. What will admissions committees look for as indicators of excellence in your nonacademic record? Naturally, it helps if you are captain of an athletic team, president of your class, valedictorian, editor of the school paper, or head of the drama or debate club. Colleges often proudly list statistics about the numbers of these individuals in every first-year class. However, while it helps to be number one in some activity, it is not essential for admission. Selective colleges also regularly list the number of valedictorians whom they reject. Yet selective colleges would not desire or be able to fill their freshman classes if they restricted admission to football captains, class presidents, and presidents of the National Honor Society. You, too, will be an attractive candidate if you have shown commitment in some activity and have been recognized for excellence in and out of school. Even if you happen to be a star, you will be competing against others like yourself—athletes, editors, dancers, community leaders. *Your* excellence must stand out.

Admissions officials look for three essential characteristics in your nonacademic performance: commitment, development, and recognition.

Evaluating Your Areas of Excellence

Recognizing your particular excellence carries your personal Strengths Assessment to another level of exactitude. You are positioning yourself to make more rational choices of colleges you would like to visit, colleges where you think you have some chance of admission.

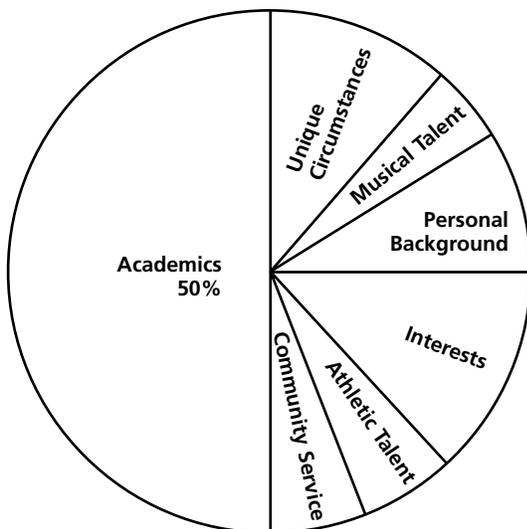
For college admissions you will be presenting a “snapshot” of your particular areas of excellence. Admissions committees want well-rounded classes more than they want well-rounded students. Some call the desirable students of today “angular” to emphasize this distinction. Ask yourself these questions and answer them below:

1. What is my most outstanding achievement outside class?
2. How can I best call attention to this in my applications?
3. How would I rate this achievement: excellent, good, fair?
4. How does my excellence match with campus activities at particular colleges (to help identify institutions that will be especially appreciative of what you do)?

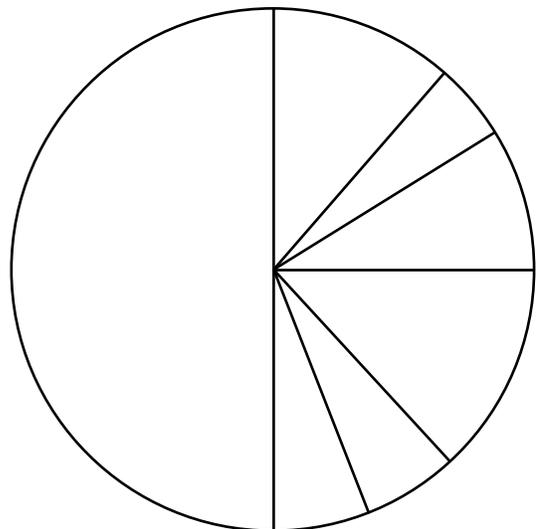
Your Personal Pie Chart

The first five steps of the ten-step plan have guided you toward understanding yourself: your strengths, interests, academic profile, testing portfolio, and post–high school preferences. You can now begin to build your own personal pie chart before moving on to exploring colleges in more depth. The pie chart below represents YOU. You will see that the left half of the chart is academic. Curriculum, your performance in your classes, and standardized testing comprise that significant slice of the pie, since they are important in the admission process. In that side of the pie, enter your academic strengths and interests, test scores, honors and AP courses, awards, and other aspects of who you are academically. The right side of the pie is divided into several smaller slices. Each slice there represents something else about you: your personal strengths, your background, your accomplishments, your character. This side shows what is special about you and what you as an individual can offer to a college. Use the pie chart as both an initial picture of yourself and a model that you can return to as you learn more about yourself through the admission process.

Sample Personal Pie Chart



Your Personal Pie Chart



Use this space for additional notes.