



College Service and College Admissions Survey 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How do I get accepted into my dream school? This is the question tormenting the 1.5 million teens in the U.S. applying for college in 2011. College admissions have become increasingly competitive each year. The acceptance rates at top universities have dropped to all-time lows as application pools have hit record highs, according to the New York Times' 2010 Admissions Data.

Parents, counselors, and other experts can offer students advice regarding target GPA and test scores they need to get into a certain school, but this third annual Community Service and College Admissions Survey is the only scientific explanation of the community service aspect of a fit application.

Does a record of stellar volunteerism really matter? Is it better to be committed to one cause or engaged in a variety of issues? What are college admission counselors really looking for when they sit down to study applications?

Highlights of the 2011 Study:

- For the first time, DoSomething.org partnered with FastWeb.com, the premier online resource for paying and preparing for college, to execute the Community Service and College Admissions Survey.
- Thirty-two of the top 50 colleges and universities (as recognized by US News and World Report) responded to the survey.

Highlights of the 2011 Findings:

Some key changes worth noting:

- 70% of admissions officers prefer students to be consistently involved with one issue over a variety of causes. This is a huge increase over last year when 50% of admissions officers said they preferred consistency over variety.
- Last year, only 33% of admissions officers thought it was possible to have "too many" community service hours; this year, that percentage increased 17 points to a whopping 50% of admissions officers believe it is possible to have "too many" community service hours.

In summary, our results this year show that admissions officers are feeling more strongly about the level of commitment to community service. Students should avoid overloading themselves with countless hours and varieties of issues, and instead demonstrate a genuine passion for something that matters to them.

THE SURVEY

The following is a comprehensive summary of the Community Service and College Admissions Survey. Actual questions are presented, along with recommendations and analysis for students from DoSomething.org.

Type of Service

1. Which would you value more: one month helping orphans in Somalia or four years volunteering at a local community shelter?

92% of admissions officers value four years volunteering at a local community shelter over a short spurt of volunteerism abroad, up from 70% in 2010. The overwhelming response indicates that long-term commitment to a cause or organization is very important. However, one admissions officer indicated, he or she would be impressed if a short trip then resulted in a long-term commitment or cause.



Our suggestions:

- If your on-the-ground experience was short, clearly communicate your long-term commitment.
- Explain your genuine passion for this cause or place.

2. Is it better to be consistently involved with one issue or a variety of causes?

72% of those surveyed prefer students to be consistently involved with one issue, while 28% value service in a variety of causes. Admissions officers understand that high school is a time of exploration, and it's O.K. to try different things to find your niche. They admire variety so long as the time spent on each is consistent. One admissions officer commented, "Dedication is the true measuring gauge."

Which is Better?

QUALITY vs. QUANTITY



72%
One Cause



28%
Many Causes

Our suggestions:

- Stress your depth of involvement over the number of issues you care about.
- If you have a long laundry list of causes, considering dedicating one of your essays to explaining how all those issues actually fit together under one larger theme like “poverty” or “human rights.”

3. Which would you value more: raising \$100,000 for the homeless or spending a summer working at a homeless shelter?

Admissions officers are split down the middle on this one: 52% value working at a homeless shelter and 48% value raising \$100,000. Engaging in the community by volunteering at a shelter is valuable, but raising a large sum of money also shows great initiative. Such a large amount of money is an impressive feat and sets you apart from the pack. On the other hand, getting your hands dirty at a shelter shows you are willing to go out of your comfort zone.

How to help?

VOLUNTEERING vs. RAISING \$100K



Value working at a
homeless shelter



Value raising \$100K

EVERYTHING YOU DO MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Our suggestions:

- Everything you do makes a difference. Whether that means fundraising or hands-on volunteering, the important thing is to show WHY you tackled this issue and HOW you did it.

4. What are the markers of “good citizenship” in service that you look for? Please rank the following from most important (1) to least important (5)

Having a leadership role still plays a huge part in admissions decisions, chosen by 76% of admissions officers as one of the most important markers of “good citizenship.” 32% surveyed ranked founding a new idea or project as the most important and 44% ranked president or leadership title at least second.

WHAT ADMISSIONS OFFICERS LOOK FOR GOOD CITIZENSHIP



76%

of admissions say leadership plays a huge part in admissions decisions.



32%

Ideas are most important.



44%

Ranked president or leadership title important.

5. Which would you value more: working on a political campaign or working with an animal welfare organization?

60% of those surveyed valued working on a political campaign over the 40% who valued working with an animal welfare organization. This is an 8% rise from the 2010 study, indicating a trend that political work is becoming an even more acceptable form of community service. Yet, many commented that despite their choice, they valued both and actually did not have a preference.

Work Value?

POLITICAL CAMPAIGN vs. ANIMAL WELFARE



Valued working on a political campaign



Valued working with an animal welfare organization.

Our suggestions:

- Admissions officers don't have a preference on this one—so go for it! If you are excited about a specific candidate, go help him/her get elected! If you are passionate about a cause, go rock it.

6. Do you consider political work (advocacy or campaigning) to be community service?

68% of admissions officers considered a political campaign to be community service, down by 12% since 2010. However, they caution that it is not considered “service” if the work is paid.



68% of admissions officers considered a **POLITICAL CAMPAIGN** to be community service.

Our suggestions:

- Make sure to be detailed and descriptive about what you did.
- Convey what the experience meant to you as a member of your community, making it clear that you worked for this candidate because you think she will make your community stronger.
- If this was unpaid volunteer work, make sure to make that clear.

Communicating Your Service

7. Can you tell when a student seems insincere about his or her volunteer experience?

Almost all admissions officers agreed that they can tell when a student seems insincere about his or her volunteer experience. They noted some red flags: the student has a rambling, unfocused list with no specifics/details, the description lacks personal depth, or the involvement is scattered/limited.

Our suggestions:

- Get personal: focus on how you changed as a result of your experience(s), rather than just outlining what you did, how many hours, etc.

8. Is it possible to have too many community service hours?

Exactly 52% of admissions officers said that a student cannot have too many community service hours, a big change from the 33.3% who agreed in the 2010 survey, indicating that community service is becoming an increasingly strong force in the admissions process. The other 48% warn that community service is always second to academic preparedness.

Our suggestions:

- Do not let other areas, especially academics, suffer due to overwhelming service hours.
- Balance community service with academics, athletics, work experience, etc.

9. Please list three words you would like to see and do not like to see when applicants describe their community service:

POWER WORDS

- passion
- founder/leader*
- commitment
- initiative*
- dedication
- impact
- growth
- personal change*
- internship*
- coordinated

DANGER WORDS

- required
- mandatory
- “Africa”*
- showed up*
- forced*
- fun*
- neat*
- brief
- obligation
- summer camp*

* words that are new in 2011

10. How should applicants document their community service?

Most applications have specific sections on the application where students can document their community service. If you have an outstanding experience, you can elaborate in an essay or through other media. One admissions officer comments that a reference letter is valuable because it shows that others recognize your dedication.

Our suggestions:

- Double check application instructions of the school to which you are applying; some encourage supplemental materials while others will simply throw them away.
- Admissions officers don't always have time to view photos and videos. Stick to writing a stellar essay.

11. How far back should an applicant cite community service?

88% of admissions officers say that the community service referenced in your application should begin with high school, while 12% say you can cite through the summer after middle school before high school. A few argue that there is no right age; whether it should be included or not depends on the level of involvement.

Our suggestions:

- Don't include every detail of your activities since the day you were born.

Understanding the Admissions Officer's Perspective

12. Are you aware when a school requires community service? Does that requirement "taint" your perception of the applicant's commitment?

Though admissions officers are usually aware when a high school requires community service, 96% of them say that a requirement does not "taint" their perception of the applicant's commitment.

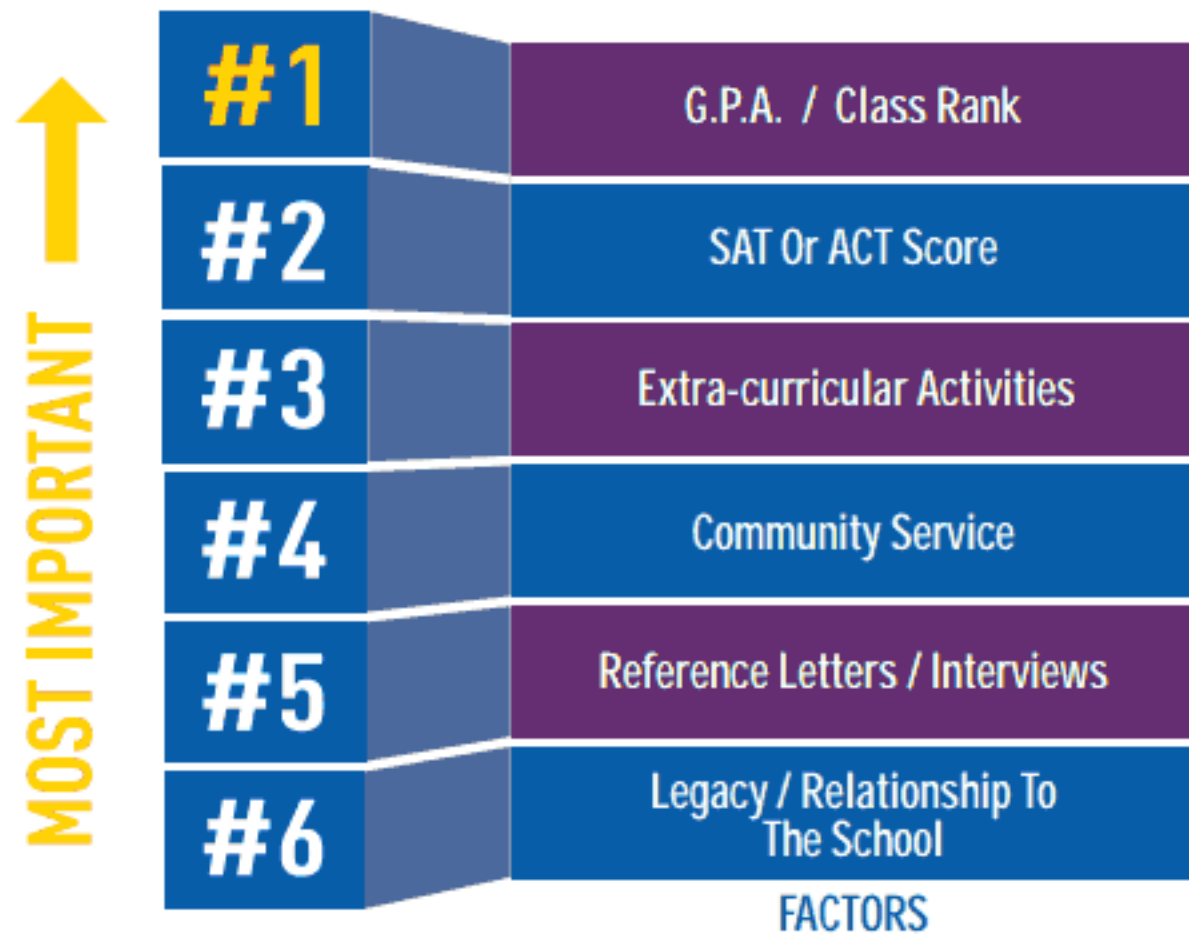
Our suggestions:

- Especially if your volunteer work was required, be able to discuss what you learned from the experiences.
- If your community service work was "above and beyond" or outside the scope of a requirement, explain what inspired you to do more.

13. Please rank the following in your admissions decisions from most important (1) to least important (6)

Important Admissions Factors

HOW TO GET IN AND WHAT IS CONSIDERED



14. Many colleges and universities reserve a certain number of spots for various special categories (legacy, specific sports, etc.). Does your admissions process reserve a number of spots for “community leaders?”

100% of admissions officers responded NO, their school policies do not reserve spots for any particular type of student. One admissions officer said, they do keep track of students engaged in the community, and encourage them to apply for specific scholarships.

Our suggestions:

- This one is pretty clear. You might win the Noble Peace Prize, but it’s not going to get you into college unless your grades and test scores are good too.

15. Do you consider the possibility that some High School students are not able to allocate time to volunteer because of the need to work to help support their family?

96% of admissions officers recognize the need to work, and some actually regard this as a “non-traditional” form of merit. One admissions officer comments, “A good citizen is more than just public service.”

Our suggestions:

- There are lots of ways to show that you care about others. Community service, political work, and an after-school job can all be viewed that way—if explained properly.
- Don’t feel discouraged or compare yourself to others. You are unique. Celebrate your uniqueness.

16. Does being a member of a service organization like Boy Scouts have more or less weight than an unaffiliated student volunteering?

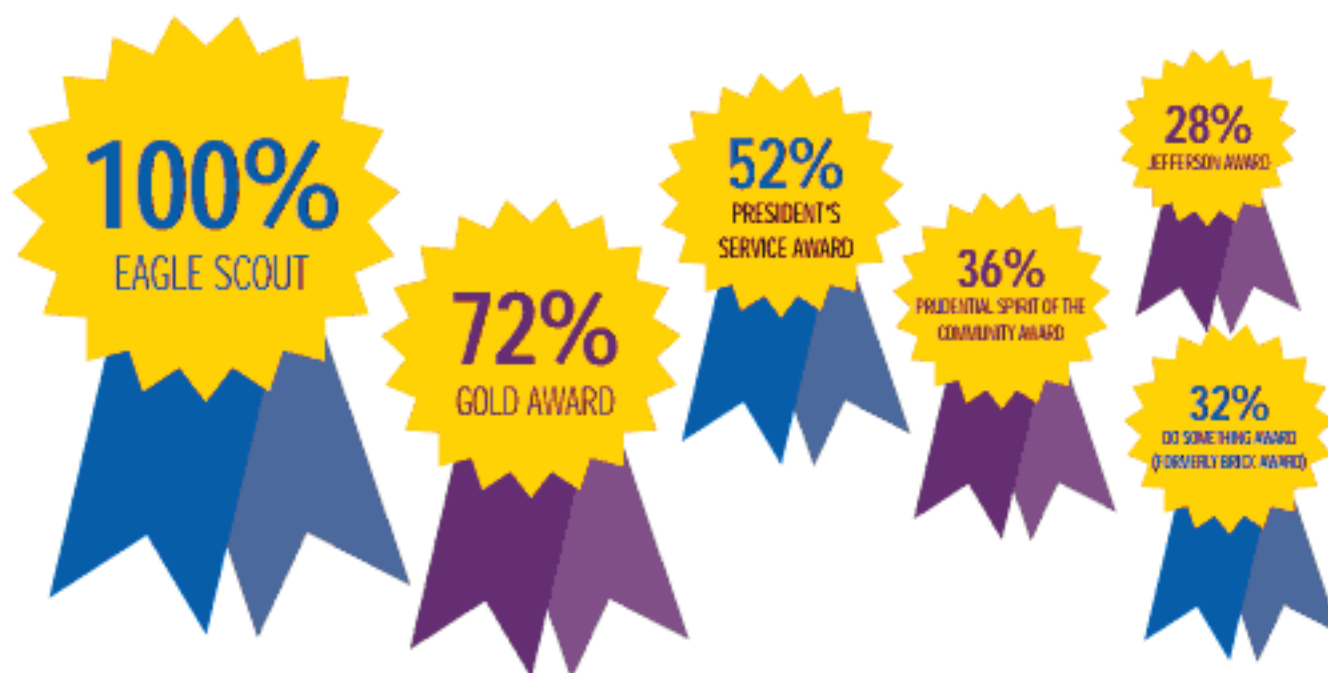
76% of admissions officers report that service organizations are not given any extra weight. 24% of admissions officers give service organizations extra value, especially if the student has received an honor or award.

Our suggestions:

- Don't pick an organization for its name; be involved with a cause or organization that genuinely inspires you.

17. Please indicate the awards that you recognize and admire (choose as many as applicable):

What awards are recognized and admired? HOW TO MAKE ADMISSIONS TAKE NOTICE



Our suggestions:

- 100% of admissions officers recognized the Eagle Scout award, but some admissions officers indicated that he or she would look up any awards listed that he or she wasn't familiar with.

18. Which would you value more: a student who took a gap year and did a service project, or a student who took a gap year and traveled the world?

95.8% of admissions officers value a student who took a gap year and did a service project, while a mere 4.2% value a student who spent the time traveling the world. Admissions officers commented that spending your year off doing service is important to community engagement.

Our suggestions:

- Always describe what you gained or learned from your experience.
- A trip around the world may come across as an extended vacation; make sure to explain how your time off was meaningful.

METHODOLOGY

In the summer of 2011 from June 13, 2011 to August 10, 2011, DoSomething.org conducted the third annual Community Service and College Admissions Survey. Admissions officers from 32 of the top 50 colleges and universities listed in US News & World Report participated in this survey.

The Community Service and College Admissions Survey is composed of 22 questions. Four of the questions were demographical (name, college or university, # of years employed there as an admissions officer, e-mail address) and will not be shared. The questions are a mixture of multiple choice, yes or no, and fill-in-the-blank, soliciting comments on each where appropriate.

Participants had to be a currently employed Admissions Officer responding on behalf of his or her college or university. Demographics and work experience vary.

The average admissions officer participating in this survey has spent **6 years** employed at his/her institution.


ABOUT US

DoSomething.org



We love teens. They are creative, active, wired, and frustrated that our world is so messed up. DoSomething.org harnesses that awesome energy and unleashes it on causes teens care about. Almost every week, we launch a new national campaign. The call to action is always something that has a real impact and doesn't require money, an adult, or a car. With a goal of 5 million active members by 2015, DoSomething.org is one of the largest organizations in the US for teens and social change. Join us at www.DoSomething.org.

Chase

CHASE  Chase is the official sponsor of the Community Service and College Admissions Survey 2011. Chase is the U.S. consumer and commercial banking business of JPMorgan Chase & Co. (NYSE: JPM), a leading global financial services firm with assets of \$2.3 trillion and operations in more than 60 countries. Chase serves consumers and small businesses through 5,200 bank branches, 16,200 ATMs, mortgage offices, and online and mobile banking as well as through relationships with auto dealerships and schools and universities. Chase also has issued more than 90 million credit cards. More information about Chase is available at www.chase.com.

FastWeb



Fastweb is the nation's recognized leader in helping students pay for school, by providing scholarship and financial aid information, as well as information on jobs and internships. One out of three college-bound seniors use the site, and more than 50 million users have benefitted from Fastweb's information and services. Fastweb lets students create a personalized profile that can be matched against its expansive databases of colleges and scholarships. As the oldest and most popular free online scholarship matching service, the database has more than 1.5 million scholarships totaling over \$3.4 billion. To learn more about Fastweb visit www.fastweb.com and follow us on Twitter at @PayingForSchool.

All rights to the *Community Service and College Admissions Survey* are the property of and reserved by DoSomething.org.

CONCLUSION

Top Colleges and Universities are interested in filling their campuses with bright, balanced, and interesting students. While grades and test scores remain the most important factors in the process, it is clear that passion and commitment to something bigger plays a key role in their decisions. Taking the lead to bring about change in a community will help set a student apart from his or her peers, but communicating depth in that experience is also a determining factor for admissions' officers. Essays are the perfect place for students to showcase the impact their service has had on both themselves and their individual communities, as well as highlight their motivations and inspirations for getting involved. Once communicated effectively, having an enriched service experience is sure to solidify a candidate's potential to be a successful college student and alumnus at any number of top colleges & universities across the country.

The full *Community Service and College Admissions Survey* is published by DoSomething.org.

This report can be downloaded online at DoSomething.org/CollegeSurvey.

For additional questions, please contact survey@dosomething.org