

“What I Like About You”: The College Selection Process

The student’s responsibility is to provide a thoughtful, thorough, authentic application. The college’s responsibility is to be deliberative and fair, and to make the right match.

Academic Background/Academic Performance

- The transcript is by far the most important document in the application.
- Greatest weight is given to a student’s academic preparation and achievement.
- Challenge of program (IB, AP, honors, college prep courses, etc.).
- High school profile—ascertaining the level and variety of courses available.

Letters of Reference

- The guidance counselor recommendation puts the student in the context of the school.
- The teacher recommendation puts the student in the context of the classroom.

The Essay

- Provides evidence of a student’s ability to express herself in writing.
- Can the student put together a sentence and a paragraph?
- Can the student form a thesis, provide detail and prove her point?
- Can the student write with nuance and creativity and a distinctive voice?
- Provides a sense of who she is—beyond the statistics—and how she thinks.

Standardized Testing

- The more national and competitive the institution, the more important the scores.
- 800+ colleges are test optional, including a number of selective colleges (Smith, Bowdoin, Holy Cross, Hamilton and Wake Forest).
- Most colleges don’t employ “cutoffs.”

Other Factors

- Interview.
- Extracurricular activities are important—value quality of involvement over quantity.
- Athletics, legacy, art/music, etc.
- Demonstrated interest. (Smith does not use demonstrated interest.)

Smith College’s Reading and Selection Process as a Model

- Holistic review.
- Admission officers read in tandem and read geographically.
- Shaping the class.