

## **Applying to Selective Universities**

**This letter was written by the Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Boston College. The information is pertinent and consistent for nearly all highly selective colleges.**

Students applying to selective colleges understandably want to know “What does it take to get in?” The answers they receive from admission professionals often sound evasive, disingenuous, and even haughty. But the truth is there is no concrete formula for gaining admission to colleges that have many superb candidates. Consider the following thoughts about selective college admissions in general and Boston College in particular.

- Most candidates applying to top schools have the preparation, performance, and personal qualities to be successful in a highly competitive learning environment.
- Selective colleges attract far more qualified candidates than they could possibly accommodate in their freshman class. The admission at these schools is highly subjective and arbitrary.
- Applicants to highly selective colleges must confront the prospect that they will be placed on a waiting list or will be refused admission without good reasons. Such an outcome does not mean they are unqualified or unworthy. It reflects the quality of competition for admission.
- For the class of 2012 over 30,000 candidates honored Boston College with application for 2,250 openings in our freshman class.
- Candidates with rigorous academic programs (honors and Advanced Placement courses) and stellar classroom performance had a better chance of being admitted.
- Highly competitive SAT or ACT scores improved the chance of admission. The test scores for the middle of the admitted class of 2012 ranged from 1950 to 2220 on the SAT and 30 to 33 on the ACT.
- Involvement with activities, service, or work is carefully considered in the selection process. We look for serious commitment, leadership, and earned recognition from peers or adults. We seek to enroll people who will enrich our community with their talents and personalities.
- The appraisals of teachers and guidance counselors influence our decisions. We value intellectual vigor, self-motivation, active participation, and the desire to pursue knowledge with creativity and independence.
- We hope candidates will use the required essay as a vehicle to reveal their ideas and opinions, their values and aspirations. We want to learn something about how they think.

As I mentioned, there is no formula for gaining admission to highly selective colleges. But I hope this has provided some insights into our evaluation of applications here at Boston College.

**John Mahoney  
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